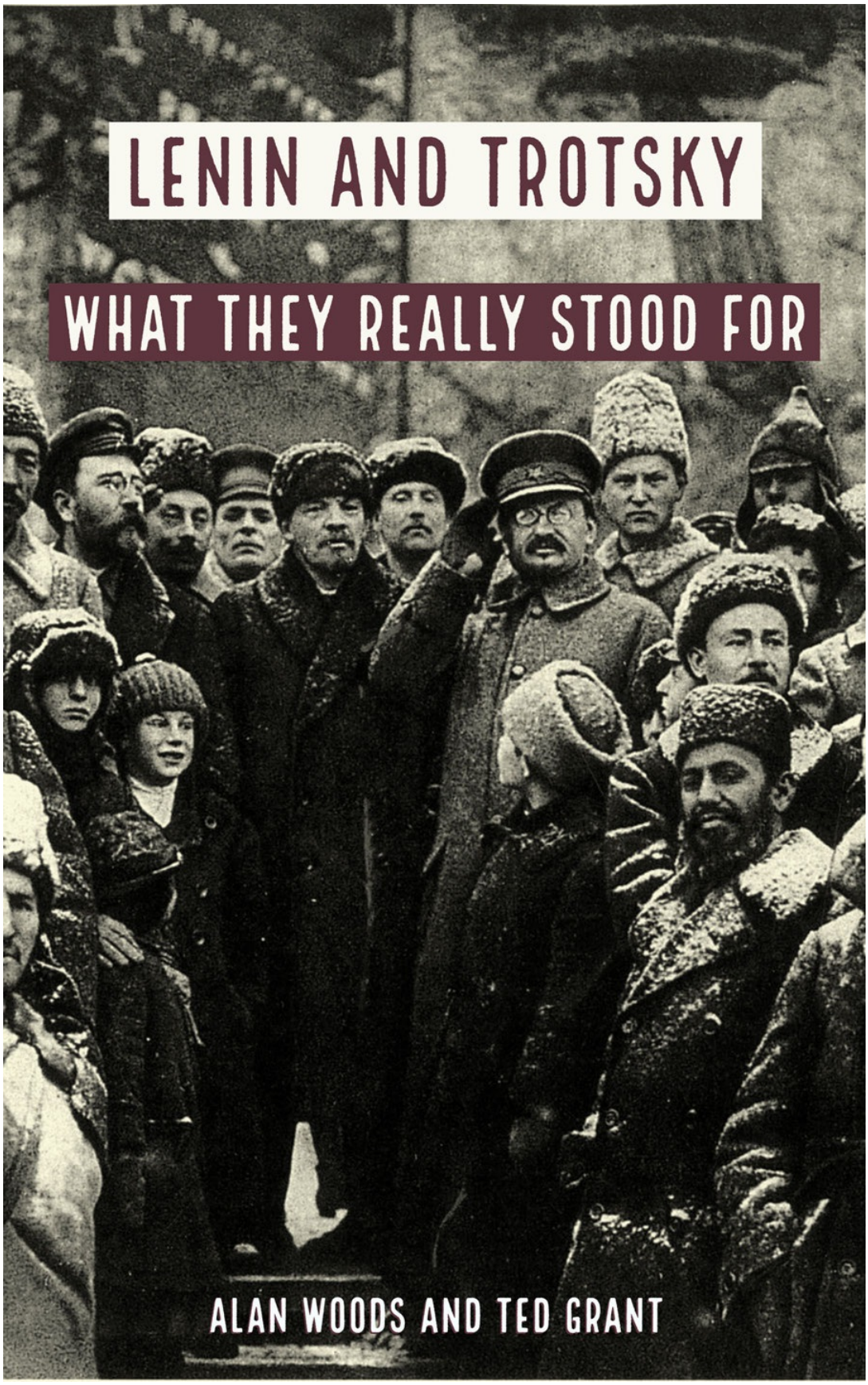
LENIN AND TROTSKY

WHAT THEY REALLY STOOD FOR



ALAN WOODS AND TED GRANT

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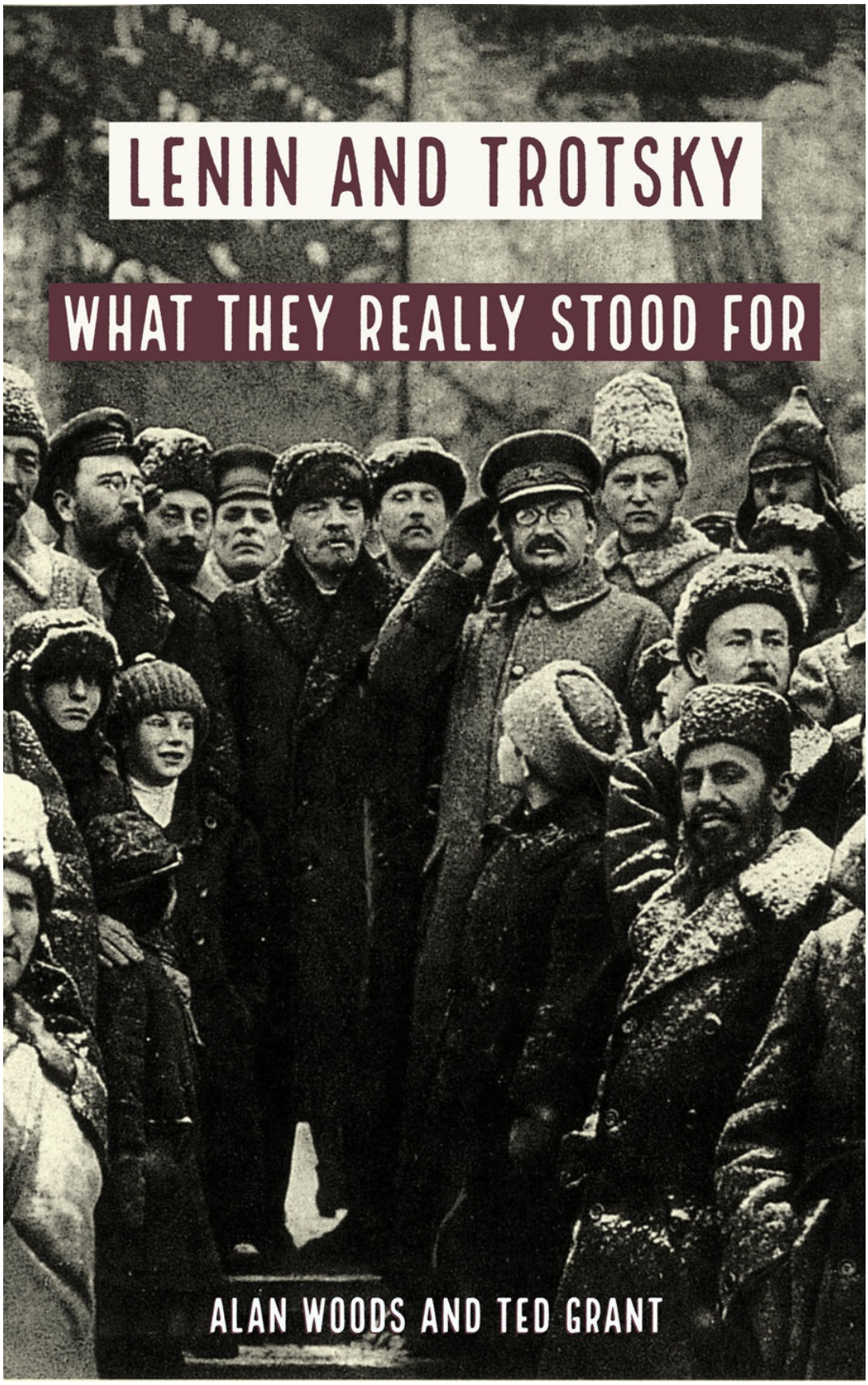

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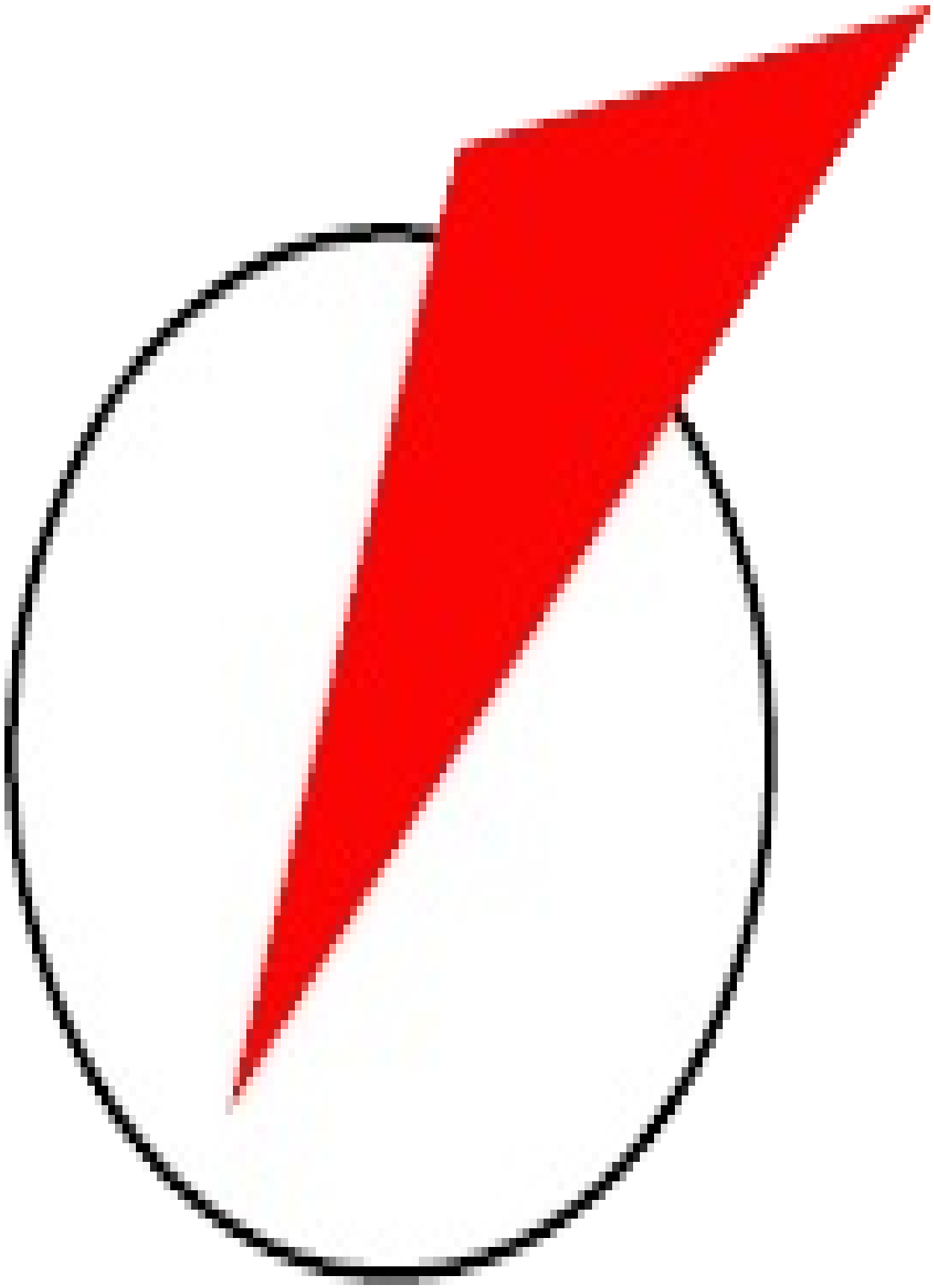

Lenin and Trotsky – What they really stood for

Alan Woods and Ted Grant

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Foreword

By Vsievolod Volkov

Lenin and Trotsky – What they really stood for by Ted Grant and Alan Woods, written three decades ago, is an extremely up-to-date book which answers a lot of questions. It goes right to the heart of the most important ideological and political battles of our times – the struggle to defend the real traditions of the October Revolution after the death of Lenin.

What was the content of the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin? On the one hand, Leon Trotsky stood at the head of a small group of courageous people who defended genuine revolutionary Marxism-Leninism. Wielding the sharply-edged weapon of the truth, they struggled to prevent the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the Soviet Union, and to eradicate the cancer of Stalinism.

In this unequal fight they were confronted not only by hired assassins but also by an immense army of intellectual criminals who worked as the auxiliaries of the former. There were thousands of such literary mercenaries, falsifiers of history and professional slanderers in every country, who were generously rewarded by Kremlin with the wealth extracted from the long-suffering Russian people. Their work was simple – to repeat like a scratched gramophone record the latest instructions from Moscow.

These criminal elements are personally responsible for the betrayal of the October Revolution and the destruction of the regime of soviet workers' democracy established by the Bolsheviks. Today they can stand back and admire the final results of their handiwork: the complete destruction of the nationalised

planned economy of the USSR. By their activities, they have thrown back the victory of the most urgent necessity and the most cherished hope of the human race – the victory of world socialism. The debt of gratitude of capitalism to these enemies and gravediggers of socialism is truly boundless!

A large number of the Stalinist falsifiers and slanderers of yesteryear have now joined in the chorus of those who proclaim the obsolescence and death of Marxism. This is rather like trying to rubbish the paintings of Rubens and Rembrandt by taking as one's point of reference some horrible caricature of their works. Neither Marx nor Engels, neither Lenin nor Trotsky can be made responsible for the twisting and falsification of the theories of revolutionary Marxism in order to justify the oppression and subjugation of the working class by a privileged bureaucratic caste, which ended up by annihilating the first triumphant socialist revolution on the planet.

It is precisely the task of the present book to shed light on these dark corners of history and unmask the distortions and falsifications of the architects of the Big Lie, and thereby to show that the ideas of Marxism as they were interpreted and applied by Lenin and Trotsky are still completely valid, and indeed more relevant today than ever before.

Leon Trotsky's minute and precise analysis of Stalin's regime of bureaucratic Bonapartism – based on the theory and method of Marxism – in his masterpiece, The Revolution Betrayed, written more than 60 years ago, is irrefutable. His prediction that the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy would move towards the restoration of capitalism has been confirmed down to the last detail. The only way in which this outcome could have been avoided was through a political revolution in the USSR which would have returned power to the working class.

To create confusion in the ranks of the exploited people, undermining and discrediting its ideological weapons, and imprisoning and murdering its leaders, has always been the most common methods whereby the exploiters maintain

themselves in power. By contrast, as Trotsky pointed out, “the truth, and not lies, is the locomotive of history.”

Mexico City, 5 May 2000

Introduction to the Fourth Edition

By Rob Sewell

It is now more than thirty years since the publication of the first edition of this work. Although republished in 1972 and 1976, it has been out of print for a number of years. It was written as a reply to Monty Johnstone, who, at that time was a leading theoretician of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and had published a reappraisal of Leon Trotsky in the Young Communist League journal Cogito at the end of 1968. Alan Woods and Ted Grant used this opportunity to write a detailed reply explaining the real relationship between the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, which had been systematically falsified by the Stalinists ever since the invention of "Trotskyism" in 1924. This was no academic exercise. It was written as an appeal to the ranks of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League to rediscover the truth about Trotsky and return to the original revolutionary programme of Lenin. "It is the duty of all comrades in these organisations," stated the authors, "to prepare themselves theoretically for the great tasks which face us."

The Cogito Article

The Cogito article appeared in October 1968 under the title of Trotsky – His Ideas, and was described as the first part of a trilogy. The second appeared in May 1976, entitled Trotsky and World Revolution. The third, which was billed as Trotskyist Policies Today, was never published. Nevertheless, Monty Johnstone's attack on Trotsky provided a valuable opportunity to engage the rank and file of the YCL and the CP in debate on fundamental questions. The significance of this opportunity was highlighted by the fact that up until then an open discussion on Trotskyism had been out of the question. A few years

previously, Betty Reid had written a vitriolic article in the CP journal Marxism Today entitled Trotskyism in Britain Today, warning the rank and file against any association with Trotskyist groups:

“We have to make clear that all these groupings without exception are out to destroy the party and to weaken and confuse the British Labour movement. We have to explain this, we have to warn against association. Finally we have to make clear that the party is united in its determination to achieve socialism, and will not tolerate association with these people, or failure to fight for our policy when they appear.”[1]

As the authors of Lenin and Trotsky explained: “Until recently, a discussion in the Young Communist League and the Communist Party on the question of Trotskyism would have been unthinkable.” Even Johnstone thought it “long overdue”, to which Woods and Grant added, “overdue, to be exact for rather more than four decades.”

The arguments put forward by Monty Johnstone against Trotsky were, however, far from original. As we shall see, they are largely a rehash of the old slanders of the past, albeit presented in a more refined form. I will not anticipate the content of the arguments, which are clearly set forth in the texts reproduced here. In order to give the reader a chance to compare the book with the arguments it responded to, we have taken the opportunity to republish Monty Johnstone’s original article from Cogito, which has also been long out of print.

Also included, as part of the appendices, is a pamphlet by Alan Woods, entitled Lenin’s Suppressed Letters, first issued in early 1970 to commemorate the centenary of Lenin’s birth, which was intended as a supplement to the original reply to Monty Johnstone. This contains material by Lenin that was deliberately suppressed by the Stalinists, but gradually released after 1956 in an attempt by Khrushchev to distance himself from the crimes of Stalin. The material relates in particular to the relations between Lenin and Trotsky. Most of these letters, but

not all – originally denounced as Trotskyist forgeries – were belatedly published by Moscow in the English edition of the Collected Works towards the end of 1970. However, as was recently disclosed by Professor Yuri Buranov, even these letters of Lenin were tampered with and altered by the Stalinists in their attempts to falsify history.

A sizeable part of the present work inevitably deals with the history of Bolshevism. Therefore, the publication of this new edition must be regarded as complementary to the recent work by Alan Woods, Bolshevism – The road to revolution, where the political issues prior to the October Revolution are dealt with in far greater depth, and Ted Grant's Russia – From revolution to counter-revolution. However, Lenin and Trotsky, written in a polemical style, is a brilliant introduction to the subject, and deserves a wider audience within the ranks of the labour and communist movement. After all, it is precisely towards those militant workers and youth that the book was first aimed. Today, after the stormy events of the last thirty years, especially with the collapse of Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe, the ideas contained in this book are more relevant than ever before.

The Issue of Trotsky

It was no accident that the issue of Trotsky was being discussed in the YCL in 1968. It was a key year. In France a six-week long revolutionary general strike – the biggest in history – erupted in May of that year. The so-called strong state of de Gaulle was paralysed. Ten million workers had occupied the factories. This magnificent movement could have easily led to the overthrow of French capitalism had it not been for the policies and conduct of the leaders of the French Communist Party. The French Prime Minister Pompidou wrote in his memoirs:

"The crisis was infinitely more serious and more profound; the regime would

stand or be overthrown, but it could not be saved by a mere cabinet reshuffle. It was not my opinion that was in question. It was General de Gaulle, the Fifth Republic, and, to a considerable extent, Republican rule itself."[2]

On May 24, de Gaulle resorted to the device he had used previously: calling a referendum. The whole question was seen as a vote of confidence in himself. However, the referendum proved impossible. Not a single print shop in France would print the ballot papers. When they tried in Belgium, the printers refused in solidarity. Within five days de Gaulle had disappeared. He had flown to Baden-Baden in West Germany, according to Pompidou in an "attack of demoralisation", and intended to withdraw from political life. It was only the efforts of General Massu which persuaded de Gaulle to return to Paris. At one point a demoralised de Gaulle told the US ambassador: "The game's up. In a few days the communists will take over." In effect, power was in the hands of the working class. Unfortunately, the French Communist Party, which had a decisive influence in the working class, failed to use the favourable opportunity to carry through the socialist revolution, and instead channelled the movement into defeat.

After a long period of relative class "harmony" following the Second World War, the French events had placed the idea of revolution firmly back on the agenda. They had the effect of shaking up the European labour movement and provoked a ferment of discussion which affected the rank and file of the Communist Parties, especially the youth. This partly explains the renewed interest in the ideas of Trotsky. But the French events were not the only cause of the unrest in the ranks of the Communist Parties. In August, the Russian bureaucracy sent tanks into Czechoslovakia to crush the tentative steps by the Dubcek government to introduce democratic "reforms". Again, the communist movement, as in 1956 with the Soviet invasion of Hungary, was shaken to its very foundations. There was a sharp polarisation in its ranks. Divisions opened up throughout the Communist Parties, especially between the Stalinist and "Euro-Communist" wings, with a layer of communist militants questioning what was taking place within the USSR and the strategy being pursued by their leadership nationally and internationally. In this ferment, the question of Trotsky's ideas and past role in the communist movement began to surface.

On the other side of the globe, the barbarous war in South East Asia perpetrated by American imperialism was met with the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese guerrilla army. The year began with the Tet Offensive which forced the Americans onto the defensive. The revolutionary struggle of the Vietnamese people set off an unprecedented student radicalisation in Britain, Europe and the United States, where a layer of radicalised youth looked to revolutionary ideas as a way forward. Inevitably, with the crisis in the Communist Parties, the ideas of Trotsky – demonised for so long by the Stalinists – began to gain a certain echo amongst these newly politicised layers, and also the communist youth.

In order to cut across this, and to stiffen up the ranks of the YCL, Monty Johnstone was assigned to write an up-to-date exposure of Trotsky and his ideas. This was a dangerous exercise, as putting Trotsky's role and ideas – even in a falsified form – openly before the YCL rank and file could generate an even greater interest in the "Old Man" and his writings. But the CP leadership had no alternative. As a result, Johnstone began a three-part series of articles in the YCL magazine, Cogito. The discussion was at last out in the open. Monty Johnstone had thrown down the challenge. Alan Woods and Ted Grant wrote at the time: "For our part, we welcome this challenge and are quite prepared to answer Comrade Johnstone's arguments, point by point." In our opinion, this remains the best all-round exposition of Trotsky's ideas and the most comprehensive answer to the calumnies and distortions of the Stalinists in recent times. We therefore have no hesitation in republishing it as our contribution to the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of Trotsky's assassination.

Monty Johnstone's Second Thoughts

Over the last period, Monty Johnstone has modified his position with regard to Trotsky. While he has agreed to the reprinting of his Cogito article, he himself stated last year, "I would today write differently in a number of respects from how I wrote in 1968, particularly with regard to the question of 'socialism in one

country'." However, he stressed that "it is certainly preferable that the reader should be able to see the original to which the reply was made."[3]

In July 1992, Comrade Johnstone issued a further article published by the Socialist History Society entitled Our History – Trotsky Reassessed. Although this is not the place for a full critique of this pamphlet, it is clear that he has changed his views somewhat since the original Cogito article. In the light of events, he felt that "our assessments need themselves to be reassessed."[4]

We would be the first people to welcome a genuine change of heart on the part of Monty Johnstone. Unfortunately, the change is more apparent than real. For example, he continues to take quotations out of context, merely presenting a caricature of Trotsky's position on a number of fundamental questions. A few examples should suffice. Despite the extensive reply by Alan Woods and Ted Grant and the debates at the time, in regard to the 1903 Second Congress of the RSDLP, Monty Johnstone still maintains the myth that "the main point at issue was the character of the revolutionary party,"[5] which is clearly not the case. This misrepresentation was comprehensively demolished in Lenin and Trotsky – What they really stood for, some thirty years ago, and, more recently in Alan Woods' book Bolshevism – The road to revolution. (Wellred, 1999)

The same treatment is meted out to Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, the Brest-Litovsk dispute, the "debate" over "Socialism in One Country", Soviet industrial policy, and other important questions. Comrade Johnstone throughout accuses Trotsky of consistent "over-estimation of revolutionary prospects in the west."[6] Moreover, "his approach to economic questions was at variance with his plea for workers' democracy."[7] Similarly, "the economic proposals of the Trotskyist Left Opposition, which envisaged funding industrialisation on the basis of unequal exchange with the peasantry – something which Stalin himself was to implement, but in a much more brutal form, at the end of the 1920s in his collectivisation drive."[8] To simply equate the proposal of the Left Opposition – which was to impose a tax on the rich peasants – with Stalin's insane policy of "liquidation of the kulaks as a class" and forced collectivisation at gun-point, is

entirely false – as was explained in the original reply of Woods and Grant.

The Opposition had opposed the policy of concessions to the wealthy peasantry since 1923, arguing that the Soviet economy needed an accelerated pace of industrialisation, financed by a tax on the wealthy peasants. The troika of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev favoured concessions to the wealthy peasants at the expense of the poor peasants and workers. This led to a dramatic increase in class differentiation in the countryside, allowing the kulaks (wealthy peasants) to concentrate greater wealth in their hands. Later, Bukharin called for the kulaks to "enrich yourselves!" The harvests improved but the kulaks got the lion's share. Industry was lagging behind agriculture, which, according to the Opposition, "undermines the bond between town and country and leads to a swift class differentiation among the peasants."[9]

In Comrade Johnstone's latest "reassessment", Trotsky's quotations are, as before, taken out of context and counterpoised to a totally different set of circumstances. For example, he quotes Trotsky's book, Terrorism and Communism, written in 1920, justifying the policies of "War Communism" and conditioned by civil war and isolation. Without any explanation of the period, Johnstone remarks: "It is not possible to ignore the authoritarian positions which Trotsky took particularly in the early 1920s … This is all too reminiscent of Stalin."[10] These lines are quite sufficient to reveal the limits of Monty Johnstone's change of heart. As before, he attempts to appear both objective and reasonable by stating "Trotsky was not always wrong; sometimes both sides were wrong,"[11] and "let us avoid arrogance in believing that we have the last word in truth. None of us has a monopoly of the truth."[12] But equating Trotsky's writings of the civil war period – when the Soviet Republic was fighting for its survival against 21 foreign armies – with Stalin's Bonapartist regime of terror, is frankly monstrous. Such violence as was used by Lenin and Trotsky during the period of the civil war was directed against the enemies of the Revolution – landlords, capitalists and imperialists. Moreover, even in the most difficult period of the civil war, the Bolsheviks maintained the most complete regime of Soviet democracy. What has this in common with the infamous totalitarian regime of Stalin, who directed his terror, not against landlords and capitalists, but against revolutionaries, workers, peasants and Bolsheviks?

Trotsky in the 1930s

According to Monty Johnstone,

"…in most cases, he [Trotsky] over-estimated the revolutionary possibilities, especially in the west, in such situations as, for instance, the 1926 General Strike in Britain, and France and Spain in 1936-37. He tended to see these revolutionary potentialities through the prism of the October Revolution. He was particularly wrong, in my view, on the Popular Front, against the Communist International, and on the character of the Second World War in 1939-40, along with the Communist International."[13]

That the 1920s and 1930s were pregnant with revolutionary possibilities is self-evident from even a nodding acquaintance with the history of Spain, France, Germany, and even Britain. It is not a question of over-estimating the revolutionary events that took place during this period, but of asking ourselves why all this revolutionary potential was wasted. Time after time, the working class moved to change society. And time after time, the workers were derailed by their own leadership. This is an incontrovertible fact. And it is equally undeniable that the false policies that were pursued by the Comintern under Stalin played a fatal role in China in 1923-27, in Britain in 1926, in Germany in 1930-33, in France in 1934-36, and, above all, in Spain in 1931-37.

In Trotsky's analysis of all these events there is not one atom of exaggeration or overestimation of the revolutionary potential of the working class. That is the line of argument that is always taken by those who wish to blame every defeat on the masses, in order to divert attention away from the role of the leaders. Trotsky's writings of the 1930s provide us with a graphic and profound explanation of the relation between the class, the party and the leadership. He

shows how it came about that, in one country after another, the efforts of the proletariat were frustrated by the Stalinist, social democratic and (in the case of Spain) anarchist leaderships. If there is any parallel with the Russian Revolution, it is the fact that the objective situation was far more favourable than that which the Bolshevik Party faced in 1917. Stalin deliberately held back the German revolution of 1923, stating that:

"…the fascists are not asleep, but it is to our interest that they attack first: that will rally the whole working class around the communists (Germany is not Bulgaria). Besides, according to all the information, the fascists are weak in Germany. In my opinion, the Germans must be curbed, and not spurred on."[14]

Stalin's opportunist policy of clinging on to the British "lefts" in the General Council of the TUC, and the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, was used to hold back the British Communist Party between 1925-26. The Anglo-Russian Committee was a formal agreement between the British and Soviet trade unions. The TUC right wing simply used the Committee as a "left" cover for their actions. The opportunist line was expressed by the British CP's call for "All Power to the TUC", which built up illusions that the TUC (led by the right wing) was capable of a revolutionary struggle. After the betrayal of the General Strike, Stalin opposed Trotsky's call to break relations with the TUC strike-breakers. "We affirm that such a policy," said Stalin, "is stupidity, adventurism…"[15] It was the British bureaucrats instead who later broke relations with the Soviet trade unions. The Stalinist policy was in ruins. However, the British Party stuck to its old position: "The campaign for 'more power to the TUC' must be intensified."[16]

In China, the revolution of 1925-27 provided a massive opportunity to extend the socialist revolution to the east. The Chinese CP was the only workers' party in the country with mass support. Instead of adopting a Bolshevik policy as in Russia in 1917, Stalin foisted the Menshevik theory of two stages on the young party. It was forced to abandon its independence and merge with the bourgeois-nationalist Kuomintang as a revolutionary "bloc of four classes". No sooner had

this happened, when Chiang Kai-shek, the real power behind the nationalist bourgeoisie, staged a coup in Canton. However, in order to continue the fight against the Left Opposition which opposed the Stalinist line in China, Stalin suppressed all news of the counter-revolution. Chiang went further and staged a further coup in Shanghai and a massacre of tens of thousands of communists.

Then Stalin backed the “left” Wang Ching-wei, who soon copied Chiang’s methods and turned on his communist “allies” in Wuhan. Stalin continued to talk of a “partial and temporary defeat”, despite the complete destruction of the Party and the ship-wreck of the revolution. The Left Opposition’s criticisms were vindicated by events, but the defeat led to further demoralisation within the USSR and the victory of the apparatus.

Popular Frontism

The insane policies of the “Third Period” adopted by the Communist International from 1928 played a particularly pernicious role. It led directly to the divisions in the German working class, where the Social Democratic workers were labelled “Social Fascists”, and ultimately led to the victory of Hitler in 1933, who boasted that he came to power without breaking a window pane. By the mid-thirties, the ultra-leftism of the “Third Period” was abandoned for the opportunist policies of Popular Frontism. The adoption of the Popular Front by the Comintern was not a return to Leninism, but to Menshevik ideas. The Communist Parties internationally were now instructed to seek alliances with the liberal bourgeois parties against the threat of fascism. This policy of class collaboration, the very basis of Menshevism, served to paralyse the proletariat. It was these very ideas that Lenin opposed in 1917 on his return to Russia, when he called for no support for the Provisional Government and the independence of the revolutionary party.

Popular Front policies played – in the words of Trotsky – a “strike-breaking”

role throughout the 1930s. In France in 1936, the working class had seized the factories. However, the French Communist Party, in order to placate the Popular Front Government of Leon Blum, acted as a brake on the movement of the working class. This was admitted in the memoirs of the leader of the French CP, Maurice Thorez:

“A demagogue would have been able at that moment to have led the workers on to the most tragic excesses. But the Popular Front stands for order, for steady and organised progress, for social peace imposed by the masses and for a return to prosperity. Straightforwardly, and weighing all my words, I declared in the name of the Central Committee:

“Though it is important to press our claims thoroughly, it is equally important to know when to stop. At the moment there is no question of taking power. For the present, our job is to obtain satisfaction for our economic demands. We must therefore know how to stop as soon as we have obtained satisfaction.”

Thorez continued:

“Again and again we have opposed the leftist phraseology used by exasperated individuals to express their impatience, and which only results in limiting and narrowing the front of the working class struggle. We have repeated hundreds of times that the Popular Front is not the revolution.”[17]

In Spain, the uprising of the masses in Catalonia in 1936 could have led to revolution throughout the whole of the country, had it not been for the actions of the Stalinist and reformist leaders. The last thing Stalin wanted was socialist revolution in Europe. Such a development would have reawakened the revolutionary spirit amongst the Russian working class and led to the overthrow of the bureaucratic regime. Stalin, having abandoned Lenin’s revolutionary

internationalist policy, wanted a diplomatic deal with the Western “democracies” in order to isolate Germany, and the Spanish revolution was sacrificed so as to impress his new would-be “friends”.

Franco could have been defeated if the workers’ leaders had pursued a revolutionary policy, on the lines of the policy pursued by Lenin and Trotsky in the period 1917-21. But the prior condition for victory was this: that the conduct of the war had to be taken out of the hands of the treacherous capitalist politicians and placed in the hands of the working people – the only ones with a firm interest in fighting the fascist counter-revolution to the end. In order to defeat Franco, the resources of Spain – the land, the banks, the industries – would have to be taken over by the workers and peasants. The masses would have to be armed in defence of their social conquests.

This was prevented by the actions of the leadership – particularly the Stalinists. Blindly following the class-collaborationist theory of the Popular Front dictated by Moscow, the leaders of the Spanish “Communist” Party became the most fervent defenders of capitalist law and order. Under the slogan of “first win the war”, they systematically sabotaged all independent movement of the workers and peasants. They pursued a class-collaborationist policy, as did the anarchist leaders of the CNT and the leaders of the POUM – who all joined the Popular Front. They justified their policy on the grounds of fighting fascism and “for democracy”. The question is how victory was to be achieved.

Trotsky answered in this way:

“You are right in fighting Franco. We must exterminate the fascists, but not in order to have the same Spain as before the civil war, because Franco issued from this Spain. We must exterminate the foundations of Franco, the social foundations of Franco, which is the social system of capitalism.”[18]

The workers of Catalonia attempted to halt the drift towards counter-revolution, and moved again to take power back into their hands in Barcelona in 1937. The defeat of the heroic proletariat of Barcelona, in which the Stalinists played an active role, unleashed an orgy of reaction which demoralised the workers and prepared the way for the victory of Franco. Overnight, the workers' committees were dissolved, the POUM outlawed and its leaders imprisoned and murdered. With the enthusiastic assistance of the Stalinists, the right-wing government of Negrin rebuilt the old capitalist state apparatus. This sealed the fate of the Republic, whose leaders now looked to make a compromise with Franco by offering a coalition. The defeat of the Spanish Revolution in turn prepared the way for the Second World War.[19]

As early as 1931, Trotsky had warned that the victory of Hitler would prepare a world war. The terrible defeat in Germany and Austria, and then Spain, led inextricably to world war in 1939. The Second World War was in reality a continuation of the imperialist war of 1914-18. Trotsky consistently opposed the imperialist war, and maintained a firm class position, as Lenin had done in 1914. Despite the Stalinist slanders that Trotsky was a Gestapo agent, it was Stalin who, failing to pull off an agreement with the capitalist "democracies", made a deal with Hitler in August 1939. This played into Hitler's hands, and prepared the way for the brutal assault on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. This resulted in a new somersault by the Stalinists, who, having originally opposed the war, now characterised it as a "just war against fascism". In 1943, Stalin obliged the imperialist Allied powers by dissolving the Comintern, without a congress or any discussion or vote. It was clear that Stalin had cynically used the Communist Parties internationally as tools for Soviet foreign policy. In Britain and elsewhere, the CP opposed strikes and became the worst chauvinists. Their propaganda amounted to the idea that "the only good German is a dead German". For his part, Trotsky called for unconditional defence of the USSR in the war, but continued to maintain the same revolutionary internationalist position that Lenin had put forward in 1914-17.

Inevitably, Monty Johnstone's "reassessment" ends up drawing pessimistic conclusions, even placing a question mark over the Russian Revolution itself.

“Whether with historical hindsight we should conclude that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were right in 1917 in setting their sights on establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat in predominantly peasant Russia, which they had hitherto opposed when it was put forward by Trotsky, is, a debate in its own right, which time will not permit me to go into now.”[20]

So this is where we finally end up. After having criticised Trotsky for disagreeing with the anti-Marxist theory of “socialism in one country”, Monty Johnstone now calls into question the conquest of power in 1917. Russia was a backward peasant country, you see, and therefore it is debatable whether the working class under those circumstances should have come to power. This was precisely the line of the Mensheviks, who subordinated the revolution to the bourgeoisie. More than 80 years after the October Revolution, Monty is not sure that it was not all a big mistake! Possibly it would have been far better to have left things to the liberal bourgeoisie. Then all would have been well. And socialism? Well, that is just an utopian dream, or at least something to be put off till the “sweet by-and-by”.

All this is not new. Johnstone merely repeats the arguments that have been used by bourgeois professors for decades against the Bolshevik Revolution. If only Lenin and Trotsky had left the bourgeoisie to get on with things, Russia would have avoided all its troubles and would have become a flourishing democracy. This argument completely flies in the face of the facts. The only alternative to Soviet power would not have been a regime of stable bourgeois democracy, which had no future under Russian capitalism, but the victory of bourgeois reaction in its most ferocious form. The attempted coup by General Kornilov was just a little warning of this. If the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, had not taken power, Kerensky would have been pushed to one side to make way for the dictatorship of the generals. What this would have meant can be seen in the horrors of the civil war when the Whites perpetrated every imaginable atrocity on the workers and peasants. Fascism would have come to power in Russia before Italy and Germany, and would have yielded nothing to the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini in brutality.

After more than 80 years, it is incredible that people who call themselves communists or socialists can call into question the validity of the October Revolution. For us, the Russian Revolution was the greatest single event in history. For the first time, apart from the brief episode of the Paris Commune, the working class succeeded to conquer state power and began to shape its own destiny. Despite the aberration of Stalinism, the USSR for a whole period demonstrated in practice the superiority of a nationalised planned economy. It gave a glimpse of the future possibilities for humanity, and was an inspiration to the oppressed on a world scale.

In his monumental work, The History of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky explained:

“Even supposing for a moment that owing to unfavourable circumstances and hostile blows the Soviet regime should be temporarily overthrown, the inexpungable impress of the October Revolution would nevertheless remain upon the whole future development of mankind.”

Rosa Luxemburg had no hesitation about the justification of October:

“Lenin and Trotsky with their friends were the first to give an example to the world proletariat. And they still remain the only ones who can exclaim with Hutten: I dared this!”[21]

We stand full square on the traditions of the October Revolution, which remain a guiding inspiration to all those who fight for the victory of the proletariat over capitalism.

Collapse of Stalinism

A false theory must sooner or later lead to disaster in practice. When Monty Johnstone wrote his original article in Cogito, it seemed to most people that the Soviet Union was an indestructible entity. True, there was this or that problem, but this was considered a case of “sunspots on the sun” rather than any deeper problem. Thirty years later, how hollow and foolish these ideas of the Stalinists appear! And how profound and correct the warnings of Trotsky in The Revolution Betrayed!

In the 1960s, despite the crisis over the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the USSR appeared to be at the pinnacle of its power. The Soviet economy had made truly gigantic steps forward since the war, making the USSR a world super-power. Commentators, both east and west, expected Stalinism to last forever. In fact, at the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev himself had forecast that the USSR would overtake the United States by 1980. No one had predicted or expected the crisis of Stalinism – except our tendency. Monty Johnstone waxed lyrical about the virtues of “socialism” in the Soviet Union. For him, it was “a fully developed, prosperous, harmonious and cultured socialist society.” (Cogito, p. 30)

However, the authors of the present work pointed out in their reply that “the Khrushchevs, the Brezhnevs, the Kosygins, are all members of the generation of gangsters and lackeys who climbed to power in the 1930s over the bloody corpse of Bolshevism”. They continued: “At the present time, the inner contradictions of the Soviet Bonapartist regime are more and more glaringly revealed.” Woods and Grant asked: “Yesterday, Stalinism was shaken by Hungary and Czechoslovakia, by France and the Sino-Soviet split. What will come tomorrow?” They went on to predict “new and terrible class battles on an international scale”, as well as “political revolution in the east”. The contradictions within the Soviet Union were corroding it from within, and were

preparing the ground for a revolutionary crisis.

The revolutionary wave of the 1970s in the west served to confirm the first part of the prognosis. The pre-revolutionary crises in Chile and Argentina, the heightened class battles in Britain, the magnificent Portuguese revolution, the overthrow of the Greek junta, the collapse of the Franco regime, the revolutionary tide throughout the Indian sub-continent and South East Asia, and the overthrow of capitalism and landlordism in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Ethiopia characterised the new period. This revolutionary upheaval coincided with the first simultaneous world slump in 1974, which opened up a new stormy phase for global capitalism.

Unfortunately, many of these movements, especially in Western Europe, were derailed by the criminal policies of the reformist and "communist" leaderships, which prepared the way for a swing to the right in the 1980s, epitomised by the victories of Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl. These were consequently underpinned by the 1980s boom, which gave rise to greater illusions in capitalism among sections of the Stalinist bureaucracies as well as reinforcing those of the reformists in the west. Of course, within this broad picture, there were militant class battles, such as the miners' strike in Britain, but the general scheme witnessed a strengthening of the bourgeois parties, and an emptying of the traditional organisations of the working class. The increased pressures of capitalism on its top layers provided the basis for a dramatic shift to the right in the leadership of the workers' parties, who wholeheartedly embraced the market and all its works. Blairism is but an extreme example of this phenomenon.

At the same time, the Soviet economy also experienced increasing difficulties as growth rates fell dramatically. By the late 1970s, the economy was grinding to a halt.

As Marx explained, the key to the development of society is the development of the productive forces. Growth rates in the eastern bloc were now below the capitalist west. The planned economies were seizing up. This crisis in Russia and Eastern Europe arose from the bureaucratic strangle-hold over the economy, and

the absence of workers' democracy. Whereas capitalism operates through the market and the laws of supply and demand, a nationalised planned economy has no such checks or balances, but has to be consciously planned and directed.

The bureaucracy, which in the past played a relatively progressive role in defending the planned economy (at enormous cost in mismanagement, corruption and waste), was utterly incapable of directing or planning the sophisticated modern economy which the USSR had become. Corruption and bureaucratic bungling systematically clogged up the arteries of the Soviet economy. From a relative fetter, the bureaucracy became an absolute fetter to further development. Only a regime of workers' democracy, with genuine soviets, and workers' control and management of the economy, can serve the needs of a nationalised economy. Only with the masses democratically involved in the running of industry and the state, at every level, can such a system function. Without this, at a certain stage, a nationalised economy will inevitably grind to a halt.

Despite the growing crisis, the bureaucracy refused to give up its power and privileges and thereby completely sabotaged and undermined the planned economy. Gorbachev attempted to reform the bureaucratic system, in a desperate attempt to find a way out of the impasse, while simultaneously preserving the power and privileges of the ruling caste. That is, he was attempting to square the circle. At the time, Gorbachev was seen as the hero of the left-reformists and the Stalinists internationally. He was praised to the skies by the Morning Star, Tribune and other such periodicals. But, as we explained at the time, such reforms could not solve the problem. While certain measures could serve to free things up for a time, they would inevitably give rise to greater contradictions. By the late 1980s, Stalinism had reached a complete impasse. A majority of the bureaucracy, influenced by the boom in the west, moved in the direction of capitalist restoration.

In November 1989, at the time of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there were moves in the direction of political revolution in East Germany. The mass

demonstrations against the regime were not pro-capitalist. They were instinctively in favour of workers' democracy. Many sung The Internationale on the demonstrations. Unfortunately, this revolutionary movement was cut across by the confused "liberal" leadership that was initially thrown up. The latter were incapable of resisting the propaganda offensive by the bourgeois of the west for German reunification. The vacuum was quickly filled by bourgeois restorationists. This collapse of the East German Stalinist regime rapidly spread to the rest of Eastern Europe. After re-unification in 1990, Kohl's conservative CDU swept the east. Russia, in August 1991, saw the coming to power of a pro-bourgeois government under the ex-communist leader Boris Yeltsin. The Stalinist system, as had been anticipated by Trotsky, collapsed like a house of cards.

Ironically, it was this threat of capitalist restoration (put forward by Trotsky as a variant in The Revolution Betrayed) that Monty Johnstone scoffed at in particular some 30 years ago. He writes:

"Out of touch with Soviet reality, he [Trotsky] wrote that 'the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far towards preparing a bourgeois restoration' and 'must inevitably in future seek support for itself in property relations' entailing 'its conversion into a new possessing class'." (Cogito, p. 33.)

All theories are tested by events. After the 60 years since Monty Johnstone wrote his critique against Trotsky and more than 60 years since the publication of The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky's prognosis has been confirmed by events. The Stalinist bureaucracies of Russia and Eastern Europe went over lock, stock and barrel to the bourgeois counter-revolution. Those who once held CP cards, spoke in the name of Lenin, and were prominent in the Soviet government and leadership, converted themselves into bourgeois agents overnight. They betrayed the Revolution without a second thought. Trotsky long ago explained:

"If – to adopt a second hypothesis – a bourgeois party were to overthrow the

ruling caste, it would find no small number of ready servants amongst the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and privileged upper circles in general."[22]

And this is precisely what has happened. The Putins, Yeltsins, Chernomyrdins and other ex-Stalinist bureaucrats have become the key representatives of the mafia capitalists that rule Russia today. Of course, even the most brilliant perspective cannot cover every eventuality. Life is too rich and varied. Lenin was very fond of quoting Goethe: "Theory is grey, but the tree of life is ever-green." Trotsky had envisaged the move towards capitalist restoration accompanied by civil war, with the working class section of the bureaucracy (for their own interests) fighting to defend the gains of the nationalised planned economy. That has not happened. Consequently, the process of capitalist restoration has gone very far. The gains of October have been reduced to rubble, with catastrophic consequences for the masses, as Trotsky also predicted. The betrayal of the bureaucracy has reached its nadir with the repulsive scramble to loot the state and privatise the wealth created by the workers of Russia and the other Republics of the Soviet Union. Here is the final vindication of Trotsky's analysis and programme, and the final condemnation and unmasking of the Stalinist bureaucracy – the gravedigger of the October Revolution.

Johnstone's Belated Admission

After pouring scorn on the idea of bourgeois restoration in Russia as a fantasy, Monty Johnstone was compelled to admit in 1992:

"I no longer find it possible to reject Trotsky's view as categorically as most of us did previously, when he predicted the danger of a bourgeois restoration in the Soviet Union. We are now seeing, particularly in Poland and Hungary, bureaucrats, both managers and party officials, who are precisely converting themselves into capitalist employers."[23]

But this admission comes just a little late. Thirty years too late, to be exact! For decades, the leaders of the CPs in the west defended every crime of the bureaucracy, every twist and turn of Moscow's policy. They did this in the name of "defending the USSR". But now it emerges that the very bureaucracy they defended was the agent of capitalist counterrevolution! Just as 30 years ago, Monty Johnstone admitted only what could not be denied.

So today, he merely states what is an accomplished fact, that the so-called communist leaders of the USSR and Eastern Europe have been at the head of the capitalist restoration.

Monty Johnstone makes this astonishing admission without batting an eyelid. But what are we saying here? That the men and women who stood at the head of all the "socialist" countries, and who were held up by Monty Johnstone and the other western CP leaders as the "great leaders" of the world working class – that these same individuals have led the bourgeois counter-revolution that destroyed all that remained of the gains of October? That the "communist" leaders have become capitalists overnight? Compared to this, the betrayal of the social democratic leaders in August 1914 was mere child's play! But how is this to be explained? The only serious explanation was made by Leon Trotsky, not in 1992 – not long after the event – but as early as 1936 in The Revolution Betrayed, an analysis which Monty Johnstone completely rejected, and from which he has still learnt very little. Johnstone writes:

"There can be no doubt that there is much popular opposition to such a bourgeois restoration in the Soviet Union today; we must hope that it will carry the day. But meanwhile, Trotsky's forebodings can, in my view, regrettably no longer be dismissed as unimaginable?"[24]

Maybe all that is happening in Russia and Eastern Europe today is "not

unimaginable" to Monty Johnstone. But it is certainly unimaginable to many Communist Party members who were led to believe for decades that the USSR and Eastern Europe were the "socialist paradise" and are now presented with the spectacle – not only of a capitalist restoration, but of a capitalist counter-revolution which is being carried out by the former leaders of the "Communist" Parties. How is such a monstrosity to be explained, from a Marxist point of view? One would search in vain in all the writings and speeches of the western CP leaders for such an explanation. Yet an explanation exists and has existed for over half a century. It is to be found in the writings of Leon Trotsky. These works are not only relevant to the past. They are of vital importance to the present and the future.

The Future of Russia

The latter-day apologists for Stalinism blame the collapse of the USSR not upon its internal contradictions, but on the individual polices of Gorbachev or Brezhnev or even Khrushchev. They are desperate to find a scapegoat. It is the same method used by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress blaming all the crimes of Stalinism on Stalin as an individual and the monstrous cult of the personality. Of course, their approach has nothing in common with the method of Marxism, which regards the actions of individuals as a reflection of material interests, of a class or caste in society. Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev were all representatives of the ruling bureaucracy within the Soviet Union. Ironically, those who sought to blame the collapse on past leaders, were the staunchest and most loyal defenders of those "great" leaders when they were in power. They could do no wrong and were portrayed as the faithful continuers of Marxism-Leninism. Until now, that is.

The fall of Stalinism was not the fall of communism or socialism, as the bourgeois, Cormists and ex-Stalinists would have us believe. Far from it. It represented the demise of a totalitarian caricature of socialism, where Soviet workers had fewer rights than those in the west. It was the internal contradictions of the bureaucratic regime which produced the crisis and its eventual downfall.

However, the attempt to move in the direction of capitalism has not produced any better results. On the contrary. The period of so-called market reform has produced the biggest drop in production ever seen in times of peace. This is what Trotsky meant when he predicted, in The Revolution Betrayed, that a capitalist counter-revolution in the USSR would signify a collapse of the productive forces and culture. That is just what we are witnessing in Russia now.

True, the capitalist counter-revolution has taken place in a different fashion from Trotsky's original view for two main reasons: (1) the total rottenness of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which had developed widespread illusions in capitalism, and (2) the throwing back of the consciousness of the Russian proletariat after decades of Bonapartist totalitarian rule. Consequently, the Stalinist regime collapsed ignominiously. It lacked any support or social basis. The bureaucrats deserted the regime like rats leaving a sinking ship. But the story is far from over in Russia. Russian capitalism has revealed its utter inability to develop the means of production and carry society forward. The present bourgeois regime is thoroughly unstable. A movement of the working class, once set in motion, could sweep it away without much effort. However, this immediately poses the question of the party and the leadership.

The working class, which has now experienced at first hand the "wonders" of capitalism (unemployment, poverty, ill-health and hunger), has not yet spoken its final word. The move to capitalism has been an absolute calamity for the Russian masses. In our opinion, this present "cold" transition to capitalism has not been fully completed – as can be seen from the collapse of the "reforms" after the August 1998 devaluation and the alarm of the imperialists.

There is no shortage of bourgeois strategists who fear a new revolution in Russia.

The right wing magazine The Economist hopes that the "Russians' extraordinary stoicism" will continue "to put off a social explosion". But the situation, which is

deteriorating, cannot hold indefinitely. The IMF and the bourgeois appear to have lost all hope. The Economist moans:

“Misfortune has been piled on misfortune. Much of Russia’s middle class has been pulverised. The monetised economy is barely half the size of the Netherlands’. The murder rate may be world’s highest. Male life expectancy has fallen to African levels: 58 years is now the average life-span, and the population is contracting by 800,000 souls a year. The country is dying on its feet.”

As Trotsky predicted, this is precisely what a new bourgeois regime would mean, “a regime of decline, signalling the eclipse of civilisation”.[25] Clearly, things cannot remain as they are. The Russian bourgeois governments have been a disaster. The Economist continues:

“In reality, the results were dismal. Pro-Western politicians in Russia turned out to be at best politically inept, at worst corrupt. Their failure has been matched by a collapse in the moral standing that the West gained among Russians when communism fell. Not for two decades have Russians been so mistrustful and cynical.”[26]

As always, the decisive factor is the subjective factor – the party and the leadership. The general reaction of the masses in Russia against capitalism should signify a rapid swing towards communism. If the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) were a real communist party, Russia, even now, would be on the eve of a new October. But this is precisely the problem. On the political front, the disillusionment with the market, especially after the collapse of August 1998, was initially expressed in growing support for the Communist Parties, especially the CPRF. However, the leaders of the CPRF have nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism. They have consistently retreated before the bourgeois counter-revolution, preferring to cling to their privileges and creature-comforts as Duma deputies rather than to base themselves on the masses. As a result their support has slipped. As we write, we read that Zyuganov and the

CPRF leaders have actually done a deal with Putin's party "Unity" to share out the committees in the Duma. This is far worse even than the conduct of the Menshevik leaders after February 1917.

Despite everything, the present situation in Russia cannot be maintained indefinitely. Without doubt, events are preparing a new revolution in Russia. If the crisis continues to deepen – and that is inevitable – at a certain stage a mass movement of the Russian working class will transform the whole situation. In the absence of an alternative, Zyuganov and the leaders of the CPRF, despite their intentions, could be thrust into power. But after their experience of Stalinism the working class will not accept a return to a totalitarian regime. There will be a whole series of crises and splits in the Communist Parties. Out of this process will come the forces that will re-establish the genuine traditions of Bolshevism, the traditions of Lenin and Trotsky. A new Russian Revolution will transform the planet, even more than the October Revolution of 1917.[27]

The process of capitalist restoration has also gone quite far in China. But here, unlike in Russia, the bureaucracy has acted to control the movement from above to ensure that they become the new ruling class. They are battling to avoid the spiralling crisis that has taken place in Russia, but their aim is the same. However, their entry onto the world market and their shift towards a market economy has led to a huge movement of the population from the countryside to the urban areas in search of work. Millions are unemployed, while tens of millions work in terrible conditions, reminiscent of the Russian working class under tsarism. Such conditions, coupled with shrinking markets in South East Asia, are preparing a social explosion. This is part of the unfolding world revolution. The capitalist system is entering a stormy period on a par with the 1920s and 1930s, which will provide many opportunities for the working class to conquer power. An essential ingredient is the development of genuine Marxist cadres integrated into the traditional mass organisations of the working class. The ideas of Lenin and Trotsky will play a vital role in this process

The Final Apostasy

Since the collapse of the USSR, the leaders of the Communist Parties have been totally unable to provide any kind of Marxist explanation for what happened. While many CP leaders have formally broken with Stalinism since 1989, a layer have crossed the class divide and repudiated Marxism altogether. They have simply ended up in the camp of reformism – even on its right wing. Such has been the fate of the Democratic Left, the left-over from the Communist Party of Great Britain, to which Monty Johnstone formally belonged. They claim 800 members, nearly 500 fewer than in 1991. The CPGB had 4,600 members at its demise, though fewer than one fifth were paying dues. In December 1999, the Democratic Left agreed to dissolve itself and become the New

Times Network. This proved too much even for Monty Johnstone, who "with sadness" resigned.

The leaders of the ex-Democratic Left and the New Times Network consider themselves to be "practical" politicians who have no need of Marxist theory. That is to say, they are politically bankrupt reformists, unashamedly acting as "left" attorneys for the right wing Labour leaders. This has been the role of the likes of Professor Eric Hobsbawm – recently made a Companion of Honour – and Martin Jacques of the defunct Marxism Today. According to Nina Temple, the co-ordinator of New Times Network:

"We want the network to involve people from many different parties and none, including people who don't describe themselves as socialists – Lib-Dems, radical democrats, civil libertarians, feminists, Greens and so on – as well as people who do."[28]

Consequently, the constitution of the Network excludes socialism as a goal. What do they propose to put in its place? Socialism is substituted by the "regulation of global capitalism". This is hardly original – the same "solution" has been advocated by George Soros. It is about as "practical" as trying to persuade a man-eating tiger to eat lettuce instead of meat. Needless to say, none

of these “practical” ladies and gentlemen can tell us how this miracle is going to be achieved.

But even if they have not the slightest idea of what they want or how to get it, they are quite clear on what they do not want. There must be no return to a nationalised planned economy. As the editorial in the same issue of New Times put it: “They must accept that the pendulum is not going to swing all the way back from the market to social ownership. Nor should it.” The conclusion is quite clear: we must at all costs stick to the “market” – i.e. capitalism. The Blairite Charlie Leadbeater is quoted approvingly: “Our aim should be to harness the power of markets and community to the more fundamental goal of creating and spreading knowledge.”[29] Leadbeater is another ex-Stalinist who jumped ship to become a prominent Blair adviser and associate of the right wing think-tank Demos. All these individuals have abandoned socialism and gone over with bag and baggage to the camp of capitalist “free market” reaction.

The role of the ex-Stalinists has won the ringing approval of the right wing.

“Democratic Left’s proposed new structure, aims and values should allow it to build on its considerable networking achievements such as Unions 21,” says John Monks, general secretary of the TUC. “I look forward to working with those who seek an open, broad approach to their politics in the spirit of building partnerships towards a modernising, progressive agenda.” This view is backed up by Lord (Tom) Sawyer, the right wing ex-general secretary of the Labour Party: “The New Times Network is an excellent idea.”[30]

One after another the former ideologues of Stalinism have ended up repudiating Lenin and the October Revolution. Often this renegacy assumes the most repulsive forms. According to Chris Myant, the former International Secretary of the CPGB, the October Revolution was “a mistake of historic proportions … Its consequences have been severe”. A review of the reactionary book, The Black Book of Communism, in New Times, goes even further, accepting all the

bourgeois arguments against communism. “The Black Book becomes a generally even-toned and informative book,” states the review, “and one that will serve as a healthy dose of medication for those still afflicted by a wish to treat the Bolshevik Revolution as a mistake, however monumental, or something that ‘had to happen’.”[31]

The conclusion of the review sums up the black pessimism of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals who clung to Stalinism but who have now departed to the greener grass of liberal democracy: “For the many who invested their hopes in the communist ‘project’, there are worse things than a mistake or even a crime. What if it was all meaningless?”[32] What a crushing comment on the blind alley into which these people have fallen! The very same people who, like Monty Johnstone, so contemptuously dismissed the views of Trotsky and Trotskyism in the past. This is the voice of apostasy, and the philosophy of despair. History has finally taken its cruel revenge on Stalinism.

Those “hard-line” Stalinists who created the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) fair little better. They maintain a bitter hostility towards Trotsky on all counts and still cling to the description of the past Stalinist regimes as “socialist” countries. Their mouthpiece, the Morning Star, slavishly justified every u-turn and crime of the Soviet bureaucracy. This January, on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Daily Worker (forerunner of the Morning Star), the Star carried an article by its editor John Haylett. Instead of an honest appraisal and balance sheet of the history of the paper, including its mistakes, it was simply a gross cover-up. Not a word was said about the period of “Social Fascism”, the Moscow Trials, Hungary 1956, or the slavish following of Moscow’s every twist and turn. While the CPB speaks about “socialist” and “progressive” policies, in reality their programme is thoroughly reformist, tail-ending the left-reformists in the Labour Party and trade unions.

Their nationalist outlook leads them to defend “British sovereignty”, while promoting class collaboration in the guise of a “democratic anti-monopoly alliance” or “Popular Front in defence of national democracy.”[33] While

correctly opposing NATO, they end up trailing after the “thieves’ kitchen” of the United Nations (to use Lenin’s words about the League of Nations). The UN is also a tool of world imperialism, but is now falsely painted by the CPB as an “impartial” arbiter in international conflicts and a solution to the problems of the work’. Such an approach is a million miles removed from the outlook and programme of Lenin and Trotsky.

Trotskyism and the Future

For decades Trotsky was considered a “non-person” within the communist movement. He was branded a counter-revolutionary and fascist, his writings were banned, and all references to his role in the Russian Revolution were expunged from the history books.[34] As a prelude to the infamous Moscow Trials, on March 7, 1935, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party ordered the removal of Trotsky’s works from the libraries throughout the USSR. Later, the ban even included some of the anti-Trotskyist material! Publications like Trotskyists – Enemies of the People and Trotskyist-Bukharinist Bandits were also proscribed. Stalin’s book On the Opposition was banned because it contained many quotes from Trotsky. This ban continued in place right up until the late 1980s. Only in the last decade have the writings of Trotsky become more accessible to a Russian audience.

In the past, a river of blood separated Trotskyism from the Stalinist organisations. But the truth always prevails. In contrast to those who have abandoned Marxism completely, a growing number of honest ex-Stalinists have gravitated towards Trotskyism.

Individuals, like the communist leader Leopold Trepper, organiser of the famous Red Orchestra, the anti-Nazi spy network in Western Europe during the Second World War, is a graphic example. In his memoirs, Trepper writes:

“All those who did not rise up against the Stalinist machine are responsible, collectively responsible. I am no exception to this verdict. But who did protest at the time? Who rose up to voice his outrage? The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honour. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-axe, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did.

“By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra.

“Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not ‘confess’, for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism.”[35]

Things are changing radically. Many rank and file members of the Communist Party, who were constantly told of the virtues of “socialism” in the USSR are now searching for a clear Marxist explanation of Stalinism, and the prospects for world socialism today. The ideas of Trotsky are finding a growing echo in this new ferment.

In the recent period, favourable reviews of Trotskyist literature have appeared in the press of the Spanish Communist Party. Alan Woods, one of the authors of this book, has spoken on a number of occasions at the Spanish CP annual festival. In Italy, Trotskyists have a growing influence in Rifondazione Comunista. The communist PRD in Indonesia has placed some of Trotsky’s writings on its recommended reading list for party education. In Russia itself,

there is growing interest in the ideas of Trotsky in the ranks of the Stalinist Parties, a process that is bound to increase as the ferment within society expresses itself in a growing discontent with the policies of the leadership.

In South Africa, there is a call within the Communist Party (SACP) to embrace the ideas of a number of leading Marxist writers who were previously banned. The documents of the SACP Tenth Congress recommend that:

"…in the struggle for the renewal of the socialist project, the SACP must expose its membership and the broader mass movement to the widest range of progressive writings and theory – including to those who were often suppressed because they were considered ' dissident' – Bukharin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg?"[36]

This new approach is directly linked to the fall of Stalinism and the influx of new members. In 1990 half the Central Committee of the SACP resigned. However, at the same time as a consequence of the legalisation of the Party, tens of thousands, mainly youth, joined the SACP.

The discussions contained in this work are thus extremely relevant to the present situation. In South Africa and elsewhere there is a heated debate over the "two stage" theory – between the policies of Bolshevism and Menshevism. In the words of communist student leader, David Masondo, SASCO's outgoing deputy president, "the 'first stage' would resolve the national question, which would not fundamentally alter the economic relations, whereas the 'second stage' was seen as a stage in which the working class would emancipate itself from capitalist exploitation". Masondo correctly says that "this is not a new debate, it is the same that the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks had before the Russian Revolution.[37]

There is a growing rejection by the communist youth of the Stalinist two-stage theory and an interest in Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution. David Masondo goes on to say that "the term 'stage' might be misleading. It might be wrongly inferred that this means a postponement of the class struggle. There is a dialectical connection between the national and class questions … the national and socialist struggle are understood to merge."

In an even more surprising move, the SACP itself is openly debating the validity of the "two stage" theory and seems to have rejected it, at least in words. The SACP's Tenth Congress documents clearly state that: "an anti-capitalist class struggle cannot be held over to some later stage of our transformation process. This is why the SACP has, since our Ninth Congress in April 1995, advanced the slogan 'Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!'"

How times have changed! These are only a few examples. Many others can be given to show how today's communist rank and file members are open to Trotsky's ideas. The old Stalinist monolith has been completely shattered.

When the Berlin Wall collapsed, Nina Temple, the then General Secretary of the British Communist Party, went so far as to state in the Executive Committee that "the Trotskyists were right that it was not socialism in Eastern Europe. And I think we should have said so long ago". Such a statement from a CP leader would have been totally unthinkable in the past!

Among honest communists everywhere, there is a thirst for Marxist ideas and clear explanations. There is profound questioning of what went wrong. This is inevitable and necessary if all the lessons are to be learnt. This process will serve to arm and strengthen the Marxist movement. For our part, we want to engage fully in this dialogue. In republishing this book on the 60th anniversary of the assassination of Trotsky by one of Stalin's agents, we believe we will help clarify the question of Stalinism from a Marxist perspective, and make clear the real ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, which have for so long been a closed book for

communist militants.

Far from being pessimistic, the Marxists have entered the new millennium supremely confident of the future. World capitalism has entered an impasse on a world scale. The twenty-first century has opened with an insurrection in Ecuador. There will be many more such movements in one country after another. The collapse of the USSR was a set-back, but not a decisive defeat for the working class. In retrospect it will be seen to have been merely the prologue of a far more decisive process – the crisis of world capitalism, of which the present crisis in Russia is only a part. A new revolutionary epoch opens up before us, which will extend over the coming decade and beyond. It will be the most convulsive period in history. Many opportunities will be placed before the working class to overthrow capitalism. Members of the Communist Parties are destined to play a key role – on one condition. They must arm and steel themselves theoretically and politically for the events that will unfold. The new generation has an enormous responsibility on its shoulders. Collectively, we must fight to re-establish genuine Marxism as a mass tendency internationally.

In 1976, Monty Johnstone, after reviewing Lenin and Trotsky – What they really stood for, stated that “its laboured apologetics seem to me dogmatic and extraordinarily blinkered.”[38] Well, we leave the reader to judge.

What is clear is that the issues raised are not at all an irrelevant debate about old ideas. They represent the defence of the Marxist method; the ideas and programme that will serve as an indispensable weapon in the struggles that lie ahead. This work is especially intended as an encouragement to Labour and Communist activists and youth to delve deeper into the writings of Marx and Engels, and especially of Lenin and Trotsky, which constitute a Marxist treasure-house from which the new generation can learn and prepare itself for the mighty events that impend. In the words of the great materialist philosopher Spinoza, our task is to “neither weep nor laugh, but to understand.”

London, March 2000

Notes

[1] Marxism Today, September 1964, emphasis in original.

[2] Quoted in Revolutionary Rehearsals, edited by Colin Barker, London, 1987, p. 24.

[3] Letter to the authors, 13 March 1999.

[4] Monty Johnstone, Trotsky Reassessed, London, 1992, p. 1.

[5] Ibid., p. 5.

[6] Ibid., p. 11.

[7] Ibid., p. 14.

[8] Ibid., p. 15.

[9] The Platform of the Left Opposition (1927) in Challenge of Left Opposition, New York, 1980, p. 324.

[10] Johnstone, op. cit., p. 19.

[11] Ibid., p. 20.

[12] Ibid., p. 34.

[13] Ibid., p. 22.

[14] Arbeiterpolitik, Leipzig, 9 February, 1929, my emphasis. For further analysis see Rob Sewell, Germany-From revolution to counter-revolution, London, 1988.

[15] J. Stalin, Works, vol. 8, Moscow, p. 191.

[16] Klugman, History of the CPGB, London, 1980, vol. 2, p. 227.

[17] Thorez, Son of the People, London, 1938, pp. 131-2.

[18] Trotsky, The Spanish Revolution, Pathfinder, 1973, p. 255.

[19] See Ted Grant, The Spanish Revolution, London, 1998.

[20] Johnstone, op. cit., p. 10.

[21] Trotsky, The History of the Russian Revolution, pp. 1192-3.

[22] Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed, Pathfinder, 1983, p. 253.

[23] Johnstone, op. cit., p. 18.

[24] Ibid., p. 18.

[25] Trotsky, In Defence of Marxism, London, 1971, p. 10.

[26] Quotes from The Economist, 6 February 1999.

[27] For a detailed analysis see Ted Grant, Russia-From revolution to counter-revolution, London, 1997.

[28] New Times, December 1999.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Morning Star, 1 January 2000.

[34] See David King, The Commissar Vanishes, Canongate Books, 1997.

[35] Leopold Trepper, The Great Game, London, 1977, pp. 55-56.

[36] The African Communist, No. 149, second quarter 1998, p. 75.

[37] Speech to SASCO’s 7th Congress, 1-5 December 1998.

[38] Monty Johnstone, Trotsky and the World Revolution, London 1976, p. 2.

A Note from the Authors

The present work is a reply to the material on Trotsky by Monty Johnstone published in the Young Communist League journal Cogito (no. 5). That work raised a whole series of historical and ideological questions which are of fundamental importance to every active member of the labour movement today. Such issues as the theory of the permanent revolution and the history of the Bolshevik Party cannot be dealt with in a few lines. To reduce them to an affair of a few paragraphs would inevitably lead to errors and misrepresentations. We have no need, then, to apologise for the length of the present document.

We have tried to deal with the main theoretical issues raised in the Cogito article. In so doing, it was necessary to follow the arguments in the sequence in which they appear in that work, though this frequently cut across both the logical and the theoretical questions involved and the historical context in which they arose. A certain amount of repetition was therefore unavoidable, although, generally speaking, those issues which recur are dealt with differently in different sections. Thus, different aspects of the theory of permanent revolution make their appearance in the section on the history of Bolshevism, and on “Socialism in One Country”, as well as under its proper heading. On this and other questions considerations of style have been sacrificed for the sake of political clarity.

Likewise in relation to quotations. We have avoided quoting isolated phrases, which can he easily manipulated and distorted. Most of the passages quoted are reproduced in full in order to convey accurately the meaning intended by their authors. This does not make for easy reading, but is a necessary safeguard against falsification.

Monty Johnstone’s declared intention is to produce a work on Trotsky in three parts. Part One – dealing with the “ideas of Trotsky” – has already appeared.

Parts Two – “Trotsky and the International Labour Movement” – and Three – “Trotskyist policies Today” – have yet to see the light of day. For our part, we welcome this challenge and are quite prepared to answer Comrade Johnstone’s arguments, point by point We have therefore refrained here from anticipating Comrade Johnstone’s future writings by developing arguments on, for example the Chinese Revolution or Popular Frontism. We have touched upon these questions only as examples and illustrations of the questions under discussion. In a future work we will deal with all these questions in a detailed manner.

The present work contains a great deal of material from the writings of Lenin. We have included extracts from many works which will be unfamiliar to most members of the Young Communist League and the labour movement generally, as they are difficult or impossible to obtain. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Lenin come from the English Collected Works in forty-two volumes, the publication of which has recently been completed. It is necessary to point out, however, that this edition itself is far from complete. The Russian edition of collected works runs into fifty-four volumes, and contains much material, including a whole series of important letters to Trotsky written shortly before Lenin’s death, which has been left out of the English edition. As a supplement to the present work, a further pamphlet is under preparation which will make this and other relevant material available to the English reader.[1]

Alan Woods

Ted Grant

October 1969

Notes

[1] Lenin's Suppressed Letters by Alan Woods has been included in this volume

[1] Lenin's Suppressed Letters by Alan Woods has been included in this volume as Appendix B.

1. Introduction

“A full discussion among Marxists about the political positions and roles of both Stalin and Trotsky are long overdue. Involving as it will do an assessment of the major policies and events of the Russian and international labour movement over four decades such a debate will be far reaching, complicated but profoundly instructive.” (Cogito, p. 2)

Such is the promise which Monty Johnstone lays before the readers of the Young Communist League journal, Cogito. It is a promise which will be welcomed by all honest members of the Young Communist League and the Communist Party, many of whom must also be wondering why this important discussion has been long “overdue”, overdue, to be exact for rather more than four decades.

Until recently, a discussion in the Young Communist League and the Communist Party on the question of Trotskyism would have been unthinkable. For forty years, the works of Trotsky have been “proscribed reading” for the majority of Communist Party members, whose doubts and questions have been met by the leaders with a steady stream of anti-Trotskyist “exposures”, based on distorted accounts of the history of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. The last attempt to deal publicly with the question of Trotskyism was Betty Reid’s article in Marxism Today[1] only four years ago, which, among other gems asserts that the Moscow Trials are purely an affair for Soviet historical research! Such material as this cannot satisfy the demands of Communists who demand truthful accounts and an analysis of the questions involved. To those comrades, we can say, together with Comrade Johnstone that:

“We would hope … that they will not be content just to learn to trot out the highly selective potted history of the international labour movement and one-sided account of Communism which are served up in their papers and education

classes.” (Cogito, p. 3)

Together with Comrade Johnstone, we can quote the words of Lenin to the Russian Young Communist League that it is necessary to take “the sum total of human knowledge … in such a way that Communism shall not be something learned by rote, but something that you yourselves have thought over, that it shall be an inevitable conclusion from the point of view of modern education.”

A discussion presupposes two sides. Comrade Johnstone calls upon his opponents to answer his case. We shall see to what extent he and the leadership of the Communist Party and Young Communist League will be prepared to allow the “full discussion” to proceed when the basic theoretical questions involved are really brought home to the rank-and-file of these organisations.

On the face of it, Monty Johnstone’s approach to the subject is eminently reasonable and objective. He is at great pains to emphasise that he has no “axe to grind”, but stands between two extremes:

“Such a work would be utterly sterile if carried out from the old positions of fixed adherence to Stalin or Trotsky. Neither apologetics nor demonology but the Marxist method of objective critical and self-critical analysis in the light of historical experience is required to arrive at a balanced estimate.” (Cogito, p. 2)

This is the basis of Johnstone’s air of lofty objectivity. He promises not to “adhere fixedly” to the “old position” of Stalin, so why should his opponents persist in defending the ideas of Trotsky? Such is the impeccable logic of Johnstone’s argument: no one advocates the “old position” of Dühring these days, so why support the ideas of Engels? No one imagines that God created the world in seven days, so why perpetuate the one-sided “cult” of Einstein and Darwin?

In reality, Johnstone has posed the question in an entirely un-Marxist way. The question is not whether we “fixedly adhere” to Trotsky, Stalin or any individual. It is a question of whether we still defend the basic ideas of Marxism itself, ideas which have been worked out scientifically, which have been added to in the light of historical experience, but which remain, in fundamentals, the same today as in the time of Trotsky and Lenin, or, for that matter, Marx and Engels. The basic issue, which Comrade Johnstone seeks to avoid, but which underlies all the arguments which he deals with, is precisely whether the “old position” of Marxism still holds good on such fundamental questions as internationalism, the role of the working class in the struggle for Socialism. the nature of Socialist society, etc. These basic ideas have been defended by all the great Marxists against the attempts of opportunists, masquerading as “Socialists” and “Communists”, to water them down, revise them and reduce them to reformist impotence. Under the guise of “modern”, “scientific”, “objectivity”, Monty Johnstone attempts to isolate these ideas as “Trotskyism”, something alien to the traditions and conceptions of Marxism, and in doing so returns to the “old position” – of Bernstein, Kautsky and the Mensheviks.

Monty Johnstone’s appeals to the Marxist method are worth nothing, because that method bases itself, first and foremost, upon scrupulous honesty and truthfulness when dealing with the writings of opponents in polemics. The most painstaking accuracy in quoting is to be observed in all the polemical works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. The great Marxists had no use for misquotation and distortion because for them, a polemic was a means of bringing out the basic ideological questions involved and of raising the political level of the membership, not scoring paltry debating points. They did not stoop to personal abuse as a substitute for arguments, but neither did they refrain from describing a rascal as a rascal, in a bid to cast a specious halo of professorial “impartiality” over their writings.

On page three of his article Monty Johnstone writes:

“The case is a political one. Personal abuse and innuendo do not figure in it.” (our emphasis)

True enough, we do not find any trace of the old filth which was churned out for decades by Johnstone’s colleagues about “Trotsky-Fascists”, “political degenerates”, “agents of Hitler” and the rest of it. Let us just taste a few samples of this Olympian objectivity:

“the magnificently written but highly slanted polemical works of Trotsky”, “swashbuckling rhetoric and flights of fancy [in place of] a calm examination of his opponents’ position…”, “adding paternalistically…”, “hurling abuse from the sidelines…”, “superficially plausible reasoning…”, “wishful thinking and infatuation with the revolutionary phrase…”, “windy and exaggerated generalisations [instead of] a balanced examination…”, “Trotsky’s dogmatic shibboleth…”, etc., etc.

Comrade Johnstone has made progress since the days of Palme Dutt, Pollitt, Gollan and Campbell’s “balanced, Marxist” analysis of Trotsky-Fascism. His progress consists in substituting for the language of the gutter the saccharine abuse and innuendo of the seminar room.

“Cult of Personality”

“The Twentieth Congress, by smashing the Stalin cult, opens the way for such an approach in the world Communist movement … Old sectarian habits and attitudes and bureaucratic resistances have held it up, but things are changing in this respect in many Communist Parties.” (Cogito, p. 2)

With these few words, Comrade Johnstone “explains” the somersault of the leaders of the World “Communist” movement on the position of Stalin, a position which they had fervently defended for thirty years, which was the ultimate, the essential article of faith, by which one could distinguish a Communist from a “Trotsky-Fascist”. Having admitted, in so many words, that a discussion on basic developments in the Russian and international labour movement was suppressed for decades, he then blithely proclaims the 20th Congress as a kind of magical key which opens all the doors barring the way to knowledge.

But just a minute, Comrade Johnstone, what about the “Marxist method of objective critical and self-critical analysis in the light of historical experience”? What about Lenin’s words on “the sum total of human knowledge” and learning by rote? The 20th Congress revealed to the World “Communist” Movement that for a matter of thirty years, for a whole historical period, all its leaders, its most trusted theoreticians, its most talented journalists had held a position which was not merely incorrect, but criminal from the standpoint of the Russian and international working class. You ask Communists to accept this without protest, to swallow it whole, and ask no questions? But surely that is just what the Marxist method is not? Surely this is just what Lenin warned the Russian Young Communist League against fifty years ago?

The first question which would occur to any thinking Communist is: Why? Why did it happen? How could it happen? We are aware that no one is perfect, that even the greatest Marxist will sometimes make mistakes… But to make such "mistakes", for such a length of time. That is monstrous. That requires an explanation. That demands an explanation.

No explanations are forthcoming from Monty Johnstone. Instead, he refers us to the text of Khruschev's speech on Stalin at the 20th Congress. But there is no point in looking for the Moscow edition. The speech, which was delivered behind closed doors, has never been published in Russia. Johnstone is obliged to quote the text of this masterpiece of modern Marxist thought from… the Manchester Guardian!

What is the "analysis" of Stalinism contained in the material issued by Moscow? The famous "theory" of the "Cult of Personality". It appears that, for a whole historical period, the "Socialist State" was ruled over by a Bonapartist dictator, who dispatched millions to forced labour in Siberia, wiped out whole peoples, exterminated the entire Old Bolshevik leadership after the most monstrous frame-up trials in history – and all on the strength of his own personality. What a travesty of Marxism and the Marxist method of analysis! The members of the Young Communist League and the Communist Party are not children, Comrade Johnstone, that they believe in fairy stories, even if these fairy stories are dreamed up in the Kremlin or in King Street[2].

For a Marxist it would be impossible to pose the question in this way. The Marxist method does not explain history in terms of the individual genius or villain, in terms of whims and "personality", but on the basis of social classes and groups, their interests and their interconnections. It is entirely inconceivable, that one man should be able to impose his ideas upon the whole of society. Marx had long ago explained that if an idea, even an incorrect idea, is put forward, gains support, and becomes a force in the lives of men, then it must represent the interest of a section of society. If Johnstone's references to the Marxist method are anything more than a mere stylistic trick, a nice turn of phrase, then we insist

that he answers a straight question: whose interests did Stalin represent? His own?

We have said that every honest Communist will welcome a thorough debate on the question of Stalinism and Trotskyism. In this regard we welcome the contribution made by Comrade Johnstone also. But what kind of a Marxist analysis is it that, while making pompous references to the Marxist method, avoids any attempt at analysing the fundamental social processes which alone can throw light on the ideas expressed at various times by Trotsky and Lenin? Without explaining these historical processes, the whole thing becomes entirely arbitrary, reducing itself to a string of isolated quotations torn out of context from the works of Lenin and Trotsky, artificially juxtaposed in order to "prove" this or that point. Of course, Comrade Johnstone, such is the essence of the "Marxist method" which has been used by the Stalinists for decades to justify every twist and turn with the appropriate sentence from Lenin. Such a method bears little relation to Marxism, but owes a great debt to the scientific methods of… the Jesuits.

Notes

[1] As this pamphlet goes to print we note that Mrs. Reid has been busy once more "creatively enriching" Marxist thought. The "reasonable" Monty Johnstone notwithstanding, her latest attack on Trotskyism yields little in viciousness to the last one and surpasses it in ignorance.

[2] King Street, London WC2, was where the headquarters of the CPGB were located.

2. From the History of Bolshevism (Part One)

“When the Trotskyists present Trotsky as the comrade-in-arms of Lenin and the true representative of Leninism after his death, it is important to be aware that in fact Trotsky only worked with Lenin in the Bolshevik Party for six years (1917-23).” (Cogito, p. 4)

The arithmetic of Johnstone’s argument seems impeccable. But let us also see what those six years represented. The period includes the October Revolution in which Trotsky “played a role second to Lenin”, the civil war, when Trotsky was Commissar for War (a post he held until 1925) and when he was responsible for the creation of the Red Army from almost nothing, the building of the Third International, for the first five congresses of which Trotsky wrote the Manifestos and many of the most important policy statements; the period of economic reconstruction in which Trotsky reorganised the shattered railway systems of the USSR. These are just a few of the petty jobs which Trotsky accomplished in his brief sojourn in the Bolshevik Party.

Monty Johnstone, however, is quite unabashed by such trivia. He prefers to dwell upon the much more interesting period from 1903-1917 (thirteen or fourteen years, no less…) in which Trotsky found himself (“not accidentally…”) outside the Bolshevik Party. What Monty Johnstone does not make clear is that the Bolshevik Party itself was not formed in 1903 but in 1912. Up until that time, both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks regarded themselves as two wings of one party – the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. By ambiguous wording and the omission of dates from various quotations, Johnstone gives the impression that the Bolshevik Party in 1903 sprang completely formed and armed on to the stage of history, like Minerva from the head of Zeus. On page six of his article Comrade Johnstone talks about the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1912 when “the Bolsheviks finally split from the Mensheviks and formed their own independent party. However, on the preceding page he writes that:

“In 1904 he [Trotsky] left the Mensheviks and, though continuing to write for their press and even having occasion to act abroad on their behalf, was to remain from then till 1917 formally outside both parties.” (Cogito, p. 5, our emphasis)

The reader scratches his head in bewilderment. How could Trotsky be “formally outside both parties” from 1904 to 1912? We shall deal with this period later and show the reasons for Comrade Johnstone’s strange reticence.

“The basis for this antagonism was Trotsky’s violent opposition to Lenin’s struggle to build up a stable, centralised and disciplined Marxist Party. When at the second congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party a split took place between the Bolsheviks … who favoured such a Party, and the Mensheviks … who wanted a much looser form of organisation. Trotsky sided with the latter…” (Cogito, p. 4)

This formulation of Johnstone’s constitutes a gross distortion of the history of Bolshevism. The split at the London Congress of 1903 did not take place, as Johnstone asserts, on the question of a “stable, centralised and disciplined Marxist Party”, but on the question of the composition of the central bodies of the Party and on one clause in the Party Rules. The differences only emerged during the twenty-second session. Prior to that, on every single political and tactical question, there was no disagreement between Lenin and Martov’s “Minority”.

Johnstone’s presentation of the differences as a clear cut split between Bolshevik “centralisers” and Menshevik “anti-centralisers” is a sheer fabrication, which has its origin in the slanders directed against the Bolsheviks by the Mensheviks after the Congress. On the famous clause on the Party Rules, Lenin himself remarked:

“I would willingly respond to this appeal [i.e. for an agreement with the “Mensheviks”] for I by no means consider our differences so vital as to be a matter of life or death to the Party. We shall certainly not perish because of an unfortunate clause in the Rules!”[1]

After the Congress, when Martov and his supporters refused to participate in the work of the Iskra editorial board, Lenin wrote:

“Examining the behaviour of the Martovites since the Congress, their refusal to collaborate on the Central Organ … their refusal to work on the Central Committee, add their propaganda of a boycott – all I can say is that this is an insensate attempt, unworthy of Party members, to disrupt the Party – and why? Only because they are dissatisfied with the composition of the central bodies; for speaking objectively, it was only over this that our ways parted…” (Lenin, Works, vol. 7, p. 34)

Time after time Lenin emphasised that between himself and the Martovite “minority” there were no differences of principle, no differences so important as to cause a split. Thus, when Plekhanov went over to Martov, Lenin wrote:

“Let me say, first, of all, that I think the author of the article [Plekhanov] is a thousand times right when he insists that it is essential to safeguard the unity of the Party and avoid new splits – especially over differences which cannot be considered to be important. To appeal to peaceableness, mildness and readiness to make concessions is highly praiseworthy in a leader at all times, and at the present moment in particular.” (ibid., p. 115)

And Lenin goes on to oppose expulsions of groups from the Party, advocates the opening of the Party press, for the airing of differences:

“to enable these grouplets to speak out and give the whole Party the opportunity to weigh the importance or unimportance of these differences and determine just where, how and on whose part inconsistency is shown”. (ibid., p. 116)

Such was always the approach of Lenin to the question of differences within the Party: a willingness to discuss, flexibility, tolerance, and above all, scrupulous honesty towards his opponents. The same, alas, can hardly be said of the leaders of the “Communist” Party today!

Monty Johnstone deliberately sets out to create a false impression about the split between the two wings of Russian Social Democracy at the Second Congress. To do this, he picks out quotations from Lenin’s Selected Works (The old Stalinist twelve volume edition), which omits most of the material on this and other questions. Why did Comrade Johnstone not refer to the complete Moscow edition? Is this beyond the resources of King Street? Or was it just in order to impress the average Young Communist Leaguer who might not have the time or opportunity to check the originals? Comrade Johnstone, here and elsewhere in his work, has shown himself to be a tireless researcher when it comes to cutting isolated phrases and sentences from One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. But a mere glance through the relevant volumes of Lenin’s Collected Works reveal the utter falsehood of Johnstone’s presentation. Thus on page 474 of Lenin’s Works (vol. 7), we read:

“Comrade Luxemburg says … that my book [i.e. One Step Forward, Two Steps Back] is a clear and detailed expression of the point of view of ‘intransigent centralism’. Comrade Luxemburg thus supposes that I defend one system of organisation against another. But actually that is not so. From the first to the last page of my book, I defend the elementary principles of any conceivable system of Party organisation. My book is not concerned with the divergences between one system of organisation and another, but with how any system is to be maintained, criticised, and rectified in a manner consistent with the Party idea.”

In reality, the differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism were not at all clear in 1903, although the discussion revealed certain tendencies of conciliationism among the Mensheviks, or “softs” as they were known. The two tendencies only crystallised subsequently, under the impact of events, and even then did not reach the point of a final break until 1912. Far from the period of Monty Johnstone’s famous “thirteen or fourteen years” consisting of a clear separation of two political Parties, right up until 1912, the history of Bolshevism was the history of numerous and repeated attempts to unite the Party on a principled basis. Furthermore, the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks were not confined, as one would suppose from reading Monty Johnstone, to the question of Party organisation, but involved every basic political question arising from the analysis of the nature of the Russian Revolution itself.

Insofar as Monty Johnstone attempts to establish differences, he falls far short of the mark. With astounding self-assurance he takes Trotsky to task for his criticism of the idea, expressed in Lenin’s What is to be Done?, that the working class, left to itself, was only capable of producing “a trade union consciousness”, i.e. consciousness of the need to struggle for economic demands under capitalism. Monty Johnstone like the Communist Party leaders is apparently unaware that Lenin himself later repudiated this early formulation, which was an exaggeration that arose from his polemic against the Economists, a tendency which wished to confine the workers struggle to the level of purely economic demands. Referring to this Lenin explained that “the Economists bent the stick one way. In order to straighten the stick it was necessary to bend it the other way.” Lenin was far from the view, found amongst the Stalinists, that the working class consists of so much putty to be moulded by the “intellectual” leadership as it pleases.

What is the purpose behind Monty Johnstone’s distortion of the history of Bolshevism? The answer is clear from the rest of his work. Johnstone wishes to perpetuate the Stalinist myth of the monolithic Bolshevik Party, which had a separate existence right from its inception in 1903. Having established this, he

can then place Trotsky firmly “outside” the Party as an undisciplined, if talented, intellectual. The stage is then set to move on to the main distortion – to establish “Trotskyism” as an alien and distinct political ideology, hostile to Leninism.

It is true that at the 1903 Congress, Trotsky found himself in the camp of Lenin’s opponents. It is also true that Plekhanov, the future social-patriot, stood together with Lenin. The fact was that the differences caught everyone by surprise, including Lenin himself, who at first did not grasp their significance. The real point at issue at the Second Congress was the transition from a small propaganda sect to a real Party, and on this question Lenin undoubtedly held a correct position. In later years Trotsky, who was always honest in relation to his mistakes, admitted his error without reservation, and stated that Lenin had always been right on this question. Monty Johnstone, quotes Trotsky’s admission, while asserting elsewhere that Trotsky was always unwilling to admit his past mistakes!

But Johnstone is doubly incorrect when he portrays the matter as though Trotsky alone misunderstood the position of Lenin. In fact the split in 1903 and even after was widely seen by Party activists in Russia as a mere émigré squabble of no practical importance, or to cite Stalin’s inimitable phrase “a storm in a tea cup”. Let us quote a typical passage from a work which Comrade Johnstone is also fond of citing. Lunacharsky’s Revolutionary Silhouettes:

“…the news of the split hit us like a bolt from the blue. We knew that the Second Congress was to witness the concluding moves in the struggle with Workers Cause (The Economists), but that the schism should take a course which was to put Martov and Lenin in opposing camps and that Plekhanov was to ‘split off’ midway between the two – none as this so much as entered our heads.

“The first clause of the Party Statute … was this really something that justified a split? A reshuffle of jobs on the editorial board – what’s the matter with those people abroad, have they gone mad?” (page 36)

Lenin's correspondence of this period indicates that the majority of the Party did not understand the split and were opposed to it. Only Monty Johnstone, sixty-five years later can see all the issues as clear as crystal. On the question of the Second Congress, he is not the equal, but the superior of Lenin himself! From the lofty heights of the Second Volume of his Selected Works, Monty Johnstone passes a damning verdict on Trotsky, who, "by sleight of hand … changed the date of the emergence of Bolshevism and Menshevism as separate tendencies from 1903 to 1904 in order that he could present himself as never having belonged to the Mensheviks, adding that his line had 'coincided in every fundamental way' with Lenin's."

To begin with, the reader should note that in the adjacent sentence, Johnstone states that from 1904 to 1917, Trotsky "remained formally outside both Parties", thus, "by sleight of hand", changed the date of the emergence of Bolshevism, not as a tendency, but as a Parry, from 1912 to 1904!

What is the meaning of Trotsky's statement that his line had coincided with Lenin's on all fundamental questions? The reader of Monty Johnstone's "highly selective potted history" of Bolshevism must be mystified by such a statement. His mystification however, cannot be attributed to Trotsky, but to Monty Johnstone, who deliberately quotes out of context in order to imply that Trotsky's account of his relations with Lenin is distorted. The distortion is entirely on the side of Comrade Johnstone, who, as we shall show, hides from the reader the real political differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism, to which Trotsky refers in the above quotation.

We have already shown the utter worthlessness of Johnstone's account of the 1903 London Congress. His assertion that Bolshevism and Menshevism emerged as separate tendencies in a political sense in 1903 is without foundation. If that is true, then Lenin himself was guilty of the arch-Trotskyist sin of conciliationism in his repeated attempts to get the Mensheviks to co-operate in the running of the Party for months after the Congress. Only late in 1904 did Lenin admit the

existence of two tendencies in the Party, and set up a Bureau of Majority (Bolshevik) Committees.

The crucial difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism – the attitude to the liberal bourgeoisie – only came to the fore in 1904. It was this political question, and not any squabble over the Party Rules that determined the evolution of the two tendencies in the direction of an irrevocable split, and led to the final transition of Menshevism to the side of the White Armies in 1918. It was precisely on this question that Trotsky broke with the Mensheviks in 1904. But Comrade Johnstone is silent on this. We shall see the reason for his silence in a later section of this work.

Notes

[1] Vtoroy S’yezd RSDRP Protokoly, p. 275.

3. From the History of Bolshevism (Part Two)

The tendency of Bolshevism grew and took shape on the basis of the experience of the 1905 Revolution, which Lenin described as “the dress rehearsal for October”. Yet Monty Johnstone has nothing to say on the entire period from the London Congress of 1903 to the period of 1910-12. Evidently nothing much happened in Russia! Johnstone’s silence is not accidental. By omitting the experience of 1905 and the attempts at reunification of the Russian Social Democracy which followed, he deepens the false impression, already created, that throughout the entire period (thirteen or fourteen years…) Bolshevism and Menshevism stood at opposite and immutable poles – Trotsky, of course, ever standing “outside the Party”.

Trotsky in 1905

What role did Trotsky play in the 1905 Revolution, and in what relation did he stand to Lenin, and the Bolsheviks? Lunacharsky, who at that time was one of Lenin's right hand men, writes in his memoirs:

"I must say that of all the Social-Democratic leaders of 1905-6 Trotsky undoubtedly showed himself, despite his youth, to be the best prepared. Less than any of them did he bear the stamp of a certain kind of émigré narrowness of outlook. Trotsky understood better than all the others what it meant to conduct the political struggle on a broad national scale. He emerged from the revolution having acquired an enormous degree of popularity, whereas neither Lenin nor Martov had effectively gained any at all. Plekhanov had lost a great deal, thanks to his display of quasi-Cadet [i.e. liberal] tendencies. Trotsky stood then in the very front rank." (Revolutionary Silhouettes, p. 61)

Trotsky was the chairman of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies, the foremost of those bodies which Lenin described as "embryonic organs of revolutionary power". Most of the manifestos and resolutions of the Soviet were the work of Trotsky, who also edited its journal Izvestia. The Bolsheviks, in Petersburg, had failed to appreciate the importance of the Soviet, and were weakly represented in it. Lenin, from exile in Sweden, wrote to the Bolshevik journal Novaya Zhizn, urging the Bolsheviks to take a more positive attitude to the Soviet, but the letter was not printed, and only saw the light of day, thirty-four years later.

This situation was to be reproduced at every major juncture in the history of the Russian revolution; the confusion and vacillation of the Party leaders inside Russia, when faced with the need for a bold initiative, without the guiding hand

of Lenin.

The political position of Trotsky and its relation to the ideas of Lenin will be dealt with more fully in the section on the theory of the permanent revolution. The crux of the matter was the attitude of the revolutionary movement to the bourgeoisie and the so-called “liberal” parties. It was on this issue that Trotsky broke with the Mensheviks in 1904. Like Lenin, Trotsky poured scorn on the class collaborationism of Dan, Plekhanov and others, and pointed out to the proletariat and peasantry as the only forces capable of carrying through the revolution to the end.

In 1905, Trotsky used the journal Nachalo, which had a mass circulation, to put over his views on the revolution, which were close to those of the Bolsheviks and in direct opposition to Menshevism. It was natural that, in spite of the acrimonious dispute at the Second Congress, the work of the Bolsheviks and Trotsky in the revolution should coincide. Thus, Trotsky’s Nachalo and the Bolshevik Novaya Zhizn, edited by Lenin, worked in solidarity, supporting each other against the attacks of the reaction, without waging polemics against each other. The Bolshevik journal greeted the first number of Nachalo thus:

“The first number of the Nachalo has come out. We welcome a comrade in the struggle. The first issue is notable for the brilliant description of the October strike written by Comrade Trotsky.”

Lunacharsky recalls that when someone told Lenin about Trotsky’s success in the Soviet, Lenin’s face darkened for a moment. Then he said: “Well, Comrade Trotsky has earned it by his tireless and impressive work.”

The progress of the revolution had given a tremendous impulse to the movement for the reunification of the forces of Russian Marxism. Bolshevik and

Menshevik workers fought shoulder to shoulder under the same slogans; rival Party committees merged spontaneously. Finally, at the suggestion of the Bolshevik Central Committee, which now once again included Lenin, moves were set afoot to bring about reunification. Trotsky had consistently advocated reunification in his journal Nachalo, and had attempted to remain apart from the factional struggle, but was arrested and imprisoned for his role in the Soviet before the Fourth (Unity) Congress took place in Stockholm.

The Congress convened in May 1906, but already by this time the revolutionary wave was ebbing, and with it, the fighting spirit and “Left” speeches of the Mensheviks. Already Plekhanov was bemoaning the “premature” action of the masses with his celebrated phrase: “They should not have taken up arms.” A conflict was inevitable between the consistent revolutionaries and those who were already abandoning the masses and accommodating themselves to the reaction.

The Stockholm Congress

The main points at issue between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks at the Stockholm Congress were:

The agrarian question.

The attitude to the bourgeois parties.

The attitude to parliamentarianism.

The question of armed insurrection.

Plekhanov, giving notice of the frightened opportunism of the Mensheviks, denounced Lenin's plan to mobilise the peasants for the nationalisation of the land as "dangerous … in view of the possibility of restoration." He summed up in a nutshell the Menshevik attitude to the seizure of power by the workers and peasants with these words:

"The seizure of power is compulsory for us when we are making a proletarian revolution. But since the revolution now impending can only be petty bourgeois, we are duty bound to refuse to seize power." (our emphasis)

Such was the argument of the Mensheviks in 1907. The revolution was a bourgeois revolution; the tasks before it were bourgeois-democratic; the conditions for Socialism were absent in Russia. Therefore, any attempt by the workers to seize power was adventurism; the task of the workers was to seek

alliance with the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, to assist them to carry through the bourgeois revolution.

What was Lenin's reply to Plekhanov? He made no attempt to deny that the revolution was bourgeois-democratic, certainly not that it was possible to build Socialism in Russia alone. All the Russian Marxists, the Mensheviks, Lenin and Trotsky were agreed on these questions. It was ABC that the conditions for a Socialist transformation were absent in Russia, but had matured in the West. Replying to Plekhanov's dark warnings of "the danger of restoration", Lenin explained:

"If we mean a real, fully effective, economic guarantee against restoration, that is a guarantee that would create the economic conditions precluding restoration, then we shall have to say: the only guarantee against restoration is a Socialist revolution in the West. There can be no other guarantee in the full sense of the term. Without this condition, whichever other way the problem is solved (municipalisation, division of the land, etc) restoration will not only be possible but positively inevitable." (Works, vol. 10, p. 280, our emphasis)

Thus, right from the start, Lenin conceived of the Russian revolution as the prelude to the Socialist revolution in the West. He tied the fate of the Russian revolution in an indissoluble link with that of the international Socialist revolution, without which it would inevitably succumb to internal reaction:

"I would formulate this proposition as follows: the Russian revolution can achieve victory by its own efforts, but it cannot possibly hold and consolidate its gains by its own strength. It cannot do this unless there is a Socialist revolution in the West. Without this condition restoration is inevitable, whether we have municipalisation, or nationalisation, or division of the land; for under each and every form of possession and property the small proprietor will always be a bulwark of restoration. After the complete victory of the democratic revolution the small proprietor will inevitably turn against the proletariat: and the sooner

the common enemies of the proletariat and of the small proprietors, such as the capitalists, the landlords, the financial bourgeoisie, and so forth are overthrown, the sooner will this happen. Our democratic republic has no other reserve than the Socialist proletariat of the West." (ibid., our emphasis)

We quote Lenin's words in full, so that there can be no suspicion of misrepresentation, no accusation from Monty Johnstone that we are quoting from Trotsky, and not from Lenin. For the reader of Monty Johnstone's article can come to no other conclusion than that Lenin here is talking pure "Trotskyism". He denies the possibility, not only of "building Socialism" in Russia alone, but even of holding on to the gains of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, without the Socialist revolution in the West. He "underestimates the role of the peasantry" by explaining that the small-property owners constitute a bulwark of restoration, and will inevitably turn against the workers, once the democratic revolution is completed.

But no, Lenin did not take these ideas from Trotsky's books on permanent revolution, which he never read, and Trotsky himself was in prison during the Congress. The ideas expressed by Lenin were the ABCs of Marxism, the fundamental principles of proletarian internationalism and the class struggle, which he defended against the opportunist distortions of the "erudite" Marxist, Plekhanov. "This is not Marxism, but Leninism" sneered the Mensheviks in 1906. This is not "Leninism", but "Trotskyism", writes Monty Johnstone in 1968. Call it what you will, gentlemen, for a Marxist, the essence of a thing is not changed merely by calling it by another name.

In reply to the argument that the Social Democracy must not frighten away its "progressive" bourgeois allies, Lenin said:

"This brought out all the more vividly the fundamental mistake of the Mensheviks. They do not see that the bourgeoisie is counter-revolutionary, that it is deliberately striving for a deal." (ibid., p. 289, our emphasis)

This was the keynote of Lenin's struggle against the Mensheviks throughout the coming period: the need to keep the revolutionary workers' movement away from ensnarement in alliances with the bourgeoisie and its parties; the insistence on the working class as the only consistent revolutionary class in society, the only class capable of settling accounts with Tsarism, if need be against the bourgeoisie:

"The only conditional and relative guarantee against restoration is that the revolution should be effected in the most drastic manner possible, effected by the revolutionary class directly, with the least possible participation of go-betweens, compromisers and all sorts of conciliators: that this revolution should really be carried to the end " (ibid., p. 281)

Lenin went on to criticise the Mensheviks for their parliamentary cretinism, their uncritical and over-optimistic view of the possibilities of Marxists utilising parliament. He sharply took Plekhanov to task for his cowardly repudiation of armed struggle. These were the issues which separated the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of Social-Democracy; not the organisational question, not "centralism", but reform or revolution, class collaborationism or reliance upon the revolutionary masses. Yet on all of this Monty Johnstone maintains a stubborn silence. The reader may wonder why! We shall be charitable and attribute it to Comrade Johnstone's natural impatience to get on to the far more "interesting period" from 1910-1916. At any rate, "thirteen or fourteen years" is a long time; who will miss a matter of five years or so? – especially when that period provides so much material which is "irrelevant" to Monty Johnstone's case against Trotsky.

The Period of Reaction

The Stolypin reaction, which began in 1907, created immense difficulties for the revolutionary movement in Russia and provoked further disagreements in the ranks of the Social Democracy. The legal activities of the Party were hamstrung by what Lenin called “the most reactionary election law in Europe”. The illegal methods of work, the so-called underground became increasingly important to offset the restrictions imposed by the regime. A section of the Menshevik wing of the Party, however, was inclined to meet the situation by increasingly accommodating itself to the demands of reaction, eschewing illegal work in favour of a comfortable parliamentary niche. This was the basis of the so-called Liquidationist dispute which led to a fresh split in the Party.

At the London Congress of 1907, Trotsky for the first time had an opportunity of expounding his views on the revolution before the Party. His speech in the debate on the attitude to the bourgeois parties, for which he was given only fifteen minutes, was twice commented on by Lenin, who emphatically agreed with the views expressed by Trotsky, especially his call for a Left Bloc against the liberal bourgeoisie:

“These facts are sufficient for me to acknowledge that Trotsky has come closer to our views. Quite apart from the question of ‘uninterrupted revolution’, we have solidarity on fundamental points in the attitude towards the bourgeois parties.” (Works, vol. 12, p. 470, our emphasis)

On Trotsky’s theory of the permanent revolution, which will be discussed in the next section, Lenin was not prepared to commit himself. But on the fundamental question of the tasks of the revolutionary movement, there was complete agreement. The differences between the positions of Lenin and Trotsky will be

dealt with later. That these differences were regarded by Lenin as secondary was again revealed at the Congress when Trotsky moved an amendment to the resolution on the attitude towards the bourgeois parties. Lenin spoke against the amendment on the grounds, not that it was wrong, but that it added nothing fundamental to the original:

"It must be agreed," he said, "that Trotsky's amendment is not Menshevik, that it expresses the 'very same', that is, Bolshevik, idea."[1] (ibid., p. 479)

But despite the identity of views on the analysis of the tasks of the revolution, Trotsky still attempted to steer a course in between the rival factions in a vain attempt to prevent a fresh split.

"If you think," he said at the Congress, "that a schism is unavoidable, wait at least until events, and not merely resolutions separate you. Do not run ahead of events."

On the basis of the experience of 1905, Trotsky believed that a fresh revolutionary upheaval would have the effect of pushing the best elements among the Mensheviks, in particular, Martov, to the left. His main concern was to hold the forces of Marxism together in a difficult period, to prevent a split which would have a demoralising effect on the movement. This was the essence of Trotsky's "conciliationism", which prevented him from joining the Bolsheviks at this period. Commenting on this, Lenin wrote:

"A number of Social Democrats in that period sank into conciliationism, proceeding from the most varied motives. Most consistently of all was conciliationism expressed by Trotsky, about the only one who tried to provide a theoretical foundation for that policy."

This was the crux of the dispute between Lenin and Trotsky before 1917; not the "underestimation of the peasantry", not "socialism in one country", but the question of conciliationism.

Trotsky's mistake was to attach too much importance to the "centrist" (semi-revolutionary) currents in Menshevism. He imagined that the unity of the Marxist movement would be brought about by the coming together of the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks and the purging of the party of the "right" and "left" extremes – i.e. the expulsion of the Menshevik liquidators and the ultra-left Bolsheviks, the "Boycotters" (otzovists). He did not understand, as Lenin clearly did, that unity could only be achieved by first ruthlessly breaking with all opportunist currents; that preservation of the forces of Marxism in a period of revolutionary retreat did not mean an abstract, formal "unity" but the systematic education of the cadres in the methods, and perspectives of the movement. The organisational flabbiness of the Mensheviks, and their political helplessness in the period of reaction was merely a reflection of their utter lack of perspective. On the other hand, Lenin's struggle for a "stable, centralised and disciplined Marxist party" flowed from the absolute necessity of educating and training a vanguard, untainted with the demoralisation and cynicism of the opportunists.

Later, Trotsky understood his mistake and unreservedly admitted that Lenin had been right all along on this question. Yet the Stalinists continue to paint in lurid colours the factional struggle between Lenin and Trotsky, dragging up all the polemical rejoinders, made in the heat of controversy in order to drive a wedge between the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky in general. Trotsky was mistaken, but his mistake was an honest one, the mistake of a revolutionary, with the interests of the revolution at heart. Not accidentally did Lenin refer to conciliationism as flowing "from the most varied motives" – i.e. revolutionary as well as opportunist. Lenin himself occasionally "erred" in his estimation of possible allies among the Mensheviks. In 1909 he offered a bloc to Plekhanov and the "pro-Party" Mensheviks. According to Lunacharsky, as late as 1917, Lenin "dreamed of an alliance with Martov realising how valuable he could be." In the event, Lenin was proved wrong. But how incomparably superior are the

mistakes of a dedicated revolutionary to the smug scribblings of the Pharisees who, half a century later, in the comfort of their studies, fight all the old battles over again – and always on the winning side.

The Bolsheviks and Lenin

“The years between 1907 and 1914 form in his [Trotsky’s] life a chapter singularly devoid of political achievement … Trotsky does not claim any practical revolutionary achievement to his credit. In these years, however, Lenin, assisted by his followers, was forging his party, and men like Zinoviev and Kamenev, Bukharin and, later, Stalin were growing to a stature which enabled them to play leading parts within the party in 1917.” (Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, p. 176)

This passage from Deutscher, quoted by Johnstone, serves only to reveal the utterly philistine mentality of its author. The “leading part” played by Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin in 1917 will be dealt with in a later chapter. Suffice it just to recall that Kamenev and Zinoviev voted against the insurrection in October 1917, and were denounced by Lenin as “strikebreakers” who should be expelled from the Party! But let us first deal with the period under consideration.

Deutscher’s point about the “lack of political achievements” is quite true, but refers not only to Trotsky but to the whole revolutionary movement in the period of reaction. How did things stand with the Bolsheviks at this time? The onset of reaction produced a serious split in the leadership, in which Lenin found himself in a minority of one. The predominant mood among the Bolsheviks was ultra-left – a refusal to recognise that the revolution was in retreat. This tendency, the polar opposite of Menshevik liquidationism, manifested itself in ”Boycottism”, i.e. the total rejection of participating in elections and working in parliament. Lenin’s closest colleagues, Krassin, Bogdanov and Lunacharsky, broke away to the “left”. The latter two fell under the sway of philosophical mysticism, a further reflection of the mood of despair fostered by the reaction.

The endless faction fights which rent the Social Democracy at this time provoked a reaction in the form of conciliationism, of which Trotsky became the main spokesman. Conciliationism had its adherents in all the groups, the Bolsheviks included. In 1910, Trotsky succeeded in securing a meeting of the leaders of all the factions in an attempt to expel both liquidators and the "Boycotters" to keep the Party together:

"The only successful result which he [Trotsky] achieved was the plenum at which he threw the 'liquidators' out of the party, nearly expelled the 'Forwardists' [i.e. the 'Boycotters'] and even managed for a time to stitch up the gap – though with extremely weak thread – between the Leninists and the Martovites." (Lunacharsky, Revolutionary Silhouettes, p. 61)

Nor was Trotsky alone in his views on Party unity. In the summer of 1911, Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

"The only way to save the unity is to bring about a general conference of people sent from Russia, for the people in Russia all want peace and unity, and they represent the only force that can bring the fighting-cocks abroad to their senses." (our emphasis)

This reference to the mood of Party workers in Russia was not accidental. Throughout the whole period – the whole of the famous "thirteen or fourteen years" – the prevailing view of the Party activists inside Russia was that the whole Bolshevik-Menshevik split was an unnecessary inconvenience, the product of the poisonous atmosphere of émigré squabbles. The impression fostered by such people as Johnstone and Deutscher of a Bolshevik Party, united solidly behind the ideas of Lenin, marching steadfastly onwards to the October Revolution, is a mockery of history.

Lenin himself, even from the earliest period, complains in his letters of the narrow outlook of the so-called “committee men”, or Bolshevik agents in Russia. His complaints become a steady stream of angry protests in the period of 1910-14 against the conduct of his own “supporters” in Russia. Maxim Gorky, who spent this period shuffling around the periphery of Bolshevism, bemoaned in his correspondence with Lenin the “squabbles among the generals” which were “repelling the workers” in Russia. The attitude of the Bolshevik “committee men” to the controversies among the émigrés is clearly expressed in a letter which was sent by a Bolshevik supporter in the Caucasus to comrades in Moscow:

“about the ‘storm in a teacup’ abroad we have heard, of course: the blocs of Lenin-Plekhanov on the one hand and of Trotsky-Martov-Bogdanov on the other. The attitude of the workers to the first bloc, as far as I know is favourable. But in general the workers are beginning to look disdainfully at the emigration: let them crawl on the wall as much as their hearts desire, but as for us, whoever values the interests of the movement – work, the rest will take care of itself! That I think is for the best.”

These lines were intercepted by the Tsarist police, who identified the author as “The Caucasian Soso”, alias Djugashvili, alias Stalin!

This contemptuous attitude towards theory, towards the “émigré squabbles”, the “storm in a tea cup” was widespread among Bolshevik activists, and provoked heated protests from Lenin, as in the letter, dated April 1912, to Orjonikidze, Spandaryan and Stasova:

“Don’t be light-headed about the campaign of the liquidators abroad. It is a great mistake when people simply dismiss what goes on abroad and ‘send it to hell.’” (Works, vol. 35, p. 33)

The vulgar conciliationism of Stalin, Orjonikidze and other ‘practical’ Bolsheviks stands out in all its uncouthness, as motivated, neither by opportunism nor by a desire for revolutionary unity, but by a simple ignorance of, and indifference to, the broader questions involved.

The upsurge in the workers movement in Russia in 1912 gave fresh heart to the Marxists – and to conciliationist tendencies in the Party. The newly-founded Bolshevik paper Pravda reflected these moods.

At the very time when Lenin was waging an all-out battle to separate, once and for all, the revolutionary wing of the Party from the opportunist, the very word ‘liquidationism’ disappeared from the pages of Pravda. Lenin’s own articles were printed in a mutilated form, omitting all polemics against the liquidators; sometimes, they simply disappeared altogether. Lenin’s correspondence with Pravda graphically illustrates the state of affairs in Russia: once more the Party “committee men” found themselves without Lenin’s guidance, once more they were floundering hopelessly off course. In a letter, dated October 1912, burning with indignation at the failure of Pravda to expose the liquidators, Lenin wrote:

“Unless Pravda explains all this in good time it will be responsible for the confusion and disruption [i.e. of the workers’ movement] … At this hot time, Nevskaya Zvezda [Bolshevik paper] is closed down, without a single letter or explanation … political contributors are left in the dark … I am obliged hotly to protest against this and to decline any responsibility for this abnormal situation, which is pregnant with drawn-out conflicts.” (Works, vol. 36, p. 196)

During the election of 1912, Lenin wrote to the Pravda editorial board (of which Stalin was a member):

“…Pravda is carrying on now, at election time, like a sleepy old maid. Pravda

doesn’t know how to fight. It does not attack, it does not persecute either the Cadet or the liquidator.” (ibid., p. 198)

Nor was the disease of conciliationism confined to Pravda. In the elections of 1912, six Bolshevik deputies were elected from the workers’ curiae. Lenin, from Poland, warned the six against falling under the influence of the Menshevik deputies:

“If all our six are from the workers’ curiae, they must not submit in silence to a lot of Siberians [i.e. intellectuals, Mensheviks]. The six must come out with a very clear-cut protest, if they are being lorded over…”

Instead the Bolshevik deputies formed a “united faction” with the “Siberians”, which issued a joint proclamation – printed in Pravda – calling for the unity of all Social-Democrats and the merging of Pravda with the liquidationist journal Luch. Together with Gorky, four of the Bolshevik deputies put their names forward as contributors to Luch.

Lenin was furious; but his protests went unheeded. In a final burst of exasperation Lenin wrote:

“We received a stupid and impudent letter from the editorial board [i.e. Pravda]. We will not reply. They must be got rid of … We are exceedingly disturbed by the absence of news about the plan for reorganising the editorial board … Reorganisation, but better still, the complete expulsion of all the old timers, is extremely necessary.” (our emphasis)

Again:

"…we must plant our own editorial staff in Pravda and kick the present one out. Things are now in a very bad way. The absence of a campaign for unity from below is stupid and despicable … Would you call such people editors? They are not men but pitiful dishrags and they are ruining the cause."

Such was the language Lenin used when attacking, not Trotsky, not the Mensheviks, but the conciliators and Menshevik camp followers in his own organisation, the editorial board of his own paper! Truly, Lenin set about the task of the creation of a "stable, centralised and disciplined Marxist party" at this time. In order to build it, he was forced on more than one occasion to fight against the very apparatus he had struggled to build.

The “Old Bolsheviks” in 1917

For a whole historical period – even more than “thirteen or fourteen years” – Lenin had attempted to educate a leadership, to instil into the cadres of Bolshevism the basic ideas, method and programme of Marxism. Above all, he hammered home the need to keep the workers’ movement free from the ideological contamination of bourgeois and petty bourgeois democracy. He emphasised repeatedly the absolute necessity of the movement retaining complete organisational independence from the parties of bourgeois democracy and from the opportunists who attempted to bring the movement under the wing of the bourgeoisie. The absolute correctness of Lenin’s stand was revealed in 1917, when the Mensheviks passed over to the camp of bourgeois democracy.

What was the position of the “Old Bolsheviks” – of Kamenev, Zinoviev, Stalin and Lenin’s other “faithful followers” in 1917? Every single one of them advocated support for the Kerensky Government, unity with the Mensheviks, that is, abandonment of the camp of Marxism for that of vulgar bourgeois democracy. Of all the “Old Bolsheviks”, whom Lenin had struggled to educate in the previous period, not one of them stood up to the decisive test of events.

How was it possible for the leaders of the Bolshevik Party, the Party of Lenin, steeled in struggle, with a correct line from its inception in 1903, to break at the decisive moment and go over to the side of opportunism? From Monty Johnstone, the perplexed reader can expect no answer. Our “impartial”, “scientific” historiographer knows of no such events! The transition from February to October was evidently accomplished, quite painlessly, by the Bolsheviks “growing over” from the democratic revolution to the socialist:

“Now that the monarch was overthrown and ‘the bourgeois democratic

revolution completed, inasmuch as Russia is now a democratic republic', Lenin mobilised the Bolshevik Party for the second stage of the revolution, which had to transfer power into the hands of the proletariat and the poor peasantry and take Russia out of the imperialist war." (Cogito, p. 11)

What was the position of the Bolshevik leaders in Russia prior to Lenin's arrival in April 1917? In glaring contradiction to everything Lenin had taught throughout the war, Pravda, which was under the editorship of Kamenev and Stalin, advocated the defence of the Bourgeois-democratic republic:

"When army faces army," wrote Kamenev, "it would be the most inane policy to suggest to one of the armies to lay down its arms and go home. This would not be a policy of peace, but a policy of slavery, which would be rejected with disgust by a free people."

Lenin's policy of revolutionary defeatism was now proclaimed, by the central organ of the Party on the eve of the Revolution, to be "the most inane policy" and "a policy of slavery"! Elsewhere Pravda editorials proclaimed:

"Our slogan is not the meaningless 'down with war'. Our slogan is pressure on the Provisional Government with the aim of compelling it [!] to induce [!] all the warring countries to open immediate negotiations … And until then every man remains at his fighting post."

The policy of Stalin and Kamenev was to take the line of least resistance, to support the Provisional Government "insofar as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution", while paying lip service to "the ultimate goal of socialism". This relegation to the remote future of the socialist revolution, while posing as "the immediate task" capitulation to bourgeois liberalism and reformism, is, of course, nothing new to the Communist Party leaders of today, for whom it

represents the very essence of “Leninism”, as enshrined in The British Road to Socialism and the policy of the Popular Front. It was essentially the same policy as that of the Mensheviks, with whom the “Old Bolsheviks” inevitably found themselves in alliance.

How did Lenin, on his return, manage to “mobilise the Bolsheviks for the second stage of the revolution” when all the leading members supported the Provisional Government? Comrade Johnstone, who passes over the entire episode in silence, is evidently loth to go into the mechanics of this wonderful “mobilisation”. It would, however, be extremely “unhistorical” on our part not to offer to fill in the details for him.

From abroad, Lenin watched the developments in the Party with alarm. He wrote repeatedly to Petrograd demanding a break with the bourgeoisie and the policy of defencism. On March 6th, he telegraphed through Stockholm:

“Our tactic: absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of the proletariat the sole guarantee; immediate elections to the Petrograd Duma; no rapprochement with other parties.” (our emphasis)

On March 17th, Lenin wrote:

“Our party would disgrace itself for ever, kill itself politically, if it took part in such deceit … I would choose an immediate split with no matter whom in our party rather than surrender to social patriotism.”

These words of Lenin were a clear warning to Kamenev and Stalin, who

nevertheless persisted in their position, in spite of the hostility of rank-and-file worker militants, many of whom resigned from the party in disgust at the capitulation of the leaders. Immediately on his return from exile, Lenin opened up a sharp faction fight against the “Old Bolsheviks”. At a meeting of Bolshevik delegates to the Soviets in April 1917, Lenin spoke bitterly of the capitulationist moods that infected the leadership:

“The basic question is the attitude to the war. The main thing that comes to the fore when you read about Russia and see what goes on here is the victory of defencism, the victory of the traitors to socialism, the deception of the masses by the bourgeoisie…

“We cannot allow the slightest concession to defencism in our attitude to the war even under the new government which remains imperialist…

“Even our Bolsheviks show some trust in the government. This can be explained only by the intoxication of the revolution. It is the death of socialism. You comrades have a trusting attitude to the government. If that is so our paths diverge. I prefer to remain in a minority…

“Pravda demands of the government that it should renounce annexations. To demand of a government of capitalists that it should renounce annexations is nonsense, a crying mockery of… [a break in the minutes]

“From the scientific standpoint this is such gross deception which all the international proletariat, all… [a break in the minutes] It is time to admit our mistakes. We’ve had enough of greetings and resolutions; it is time to act.” (Works, vol. 36, pp. 434-8)

Turning to the Menshevik Manifesto of the Soviet “To the Peoples of the Whole World”, which Pravda had heralded as a “conscious compromise between different tendencies represented in the Soviet”, and which had been voted for by the Bolshevik delegates under the influence of Stalin and Kamenev, Lenin remarked:

“The manifesto of the Soviet of Workers’ deputies contains not one word imbued with class-consciousness. It’s all talk! Talk, flattery of the revolutionary people, is the only thing that has ruined all revolutions. The whole of Marxism teaches us not to succumb to revolutionary phrases, particularly at a time when they have the greatest currency.” (ibid., p. 439)

Who was Lenin criticising for having succumbed to the “revolutionary phrase”, Comrade Johnstone? Was it Trotsky, who was not even in the country at the time? No, Comrade Johnstone, it was Stalin and Kamenev, those “hardened Bolsheviks”, those dedicated “Leninists” who played such an “important role within the Party” in 1917! Three days before this meeting, Stalin had pronounced in favour of accepting the proposal of the Menshevik Tseretelli for unification of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. His ground for this was that, since both parties agreed on the position of the Manifesto of the Soviet, there were no fundamental differences of principle between the parties. Referring obliquely to this, Lenin issued a sharp warning:

“I have heard that there is a tendency in Russia towards unification, towards unity with the defencists. This is a betrayal of socialism. I think it is better to remain alone, like Liebknecht: one against 110.” (ibid., p. 443)

So here we have it: “betrayal of socialism”, “deception of the masses”, “nonsense”, “a crying mockery”, “gross deception”. This is the language Lenin had to resort to in order to “mobilise the Bolshevik Party” for the socialist revolution! After Lenin’s tirade, Stalin retired from the stage of public debate heavily compromised by his social-patriotic stand and quietly sidled over to

Lenin's position; Kamenev and Zinoviev persisted in their opposition right up to October, when they voted against insurrection and waged a campaign inside and outside the Party against it. Such was the "important role" played by these "Old Bolsheviks" that, on the eve of the October revolution, Lenin angrily demanded their expulsion from the Party.

Monty Johnstone attacks Trotsky for his conciliationism before 1917, but forgets to mention that Stalin and Co. were so clear on the question of conciliationism that they advocated unification with the Mensheviks a matter of months before the October Revolution, at the very time when the differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism (i.e. revolution and counter-revolution) should have been posed in the sharpest, most implacable manner.

Having made the point, however, it is necessary to add that, for all their failings, the "Old Bolsheviks" were genuine revolutionaries. They made a mistake, a fundamental mistake, which, had it not been for the intervention of Lenin and Trotsky would have led to disaster. Without the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky the Russian Revolution would not have taken place in 1917. Either a workers' dictatorship or Kornilovite reaction: that is the way in which Lenin posed the alternatives in 1917. Without the struggle waged, in particular by Lenin, with all his immense personal authority, the movement would undoubtedly have fallen beneath the mailed fist of reaction.

Nevertheless, despite their weaknesses and vacillations, Kamenev and Zinoviev were not put on trial, were not accused of being "agents of German imperialism", were not tortured to extract false confessions, were not executed. In the traditions of Bolshevism, traditions of tolerance and sense of proportion, Kamenev and Zinoviev were not only not expelled but even elected to the Central Committee and Politburo, the highest positions of responsibility. Even after that, they did not always act unerringly, and sometimes made disastrous mistakes: but even the worst mistakes of the "Old Bolsheviks" cannot be equated with the treachery and outright betrayal of the revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy and its apologists internationally. The traditions of Stalinist

totalitarianism and those of Bolshevik-Leninism were sundered by a river of blood.

Trotsky and the Bolsheviks in 1917

We have seen how Monty Johnstone utilises the services of Trotsky's "highly sympathetic but also extremely objective biographer", Isaac Deutscher. Johnstone frequently has recourse to Deutscher, who at once relieves him of the painful necessity of quoting from Trotsky's own works, and obligingly provides him with the sort of trite, literary commonplaces about Trotsky's psychological and moral attributes which serve him as a useful, if rather rusty, nail upon which to hang his own "thesis" on Trotsky, which now triumphantly emerges:

"The fact is … that although Trotsky was to join the Bolshevik Party in July, 1917, under the impetus [?] of the oncoming [?] October Revolution in which he was to play such an outstanding role [??], we find in these fourteen years of Trotsky's life … the very inability to devote himself in a non-revolutionary period to the overriding task of building up a solid organisation, fitting himself into its ranks, and hence being prepared to submit himself to its collective discipline that was to reveal itself again after the storms of revolution had died down." (Cogito, p. 7)

Johnstone wishes to paint a picture of Trotsky as a revolutionary firebrand, a "brilliant orator", who derived inspiration from the "storms of revolution", a good rabble-rouser, but essentially a petty-bourgeois individualist, whose morale flagged as soon as the revolutionary situation passed. His whole work is a fine piece of impressionist word-painting: and like all the works of the impressionists, it looks good, at a distance, if you keep your eyes half shut…

We would ask Comrade Johnstone, firstly, how was it possible for this "brilliant orator" to join the Bolshevik Party "under the impetus" of something which had not happened? Clearly, Monty Johnstone is itching to switch the date of

Trotsky's joining the Bolsheviks to sometime after the October Revolution ("by sleight of hand", as they say). But no, such a distortion would be too much even for our Jesuit; reluctantly, Trotsky is made to join "under the impetus of the oncoming October Revolution!"

There is a further little difficulty, however, namely that Trotsky himself, in Monty Johnstone's words played an "outstanding role" in bringing this "oncoming" revolution into being. In fact, Trotsky formally joined the Bolshevik Party, not when it was on the crest of a revolutionary wave, on the point of seizing power, as Johnstone implies, but, on the contrary, when its fortunes appeared to be at a low ebb in the period of reaction following the "July Days" when Lenin was in hiding and many Bolsheviks were in prison.

Why did Trotsky join the Bolsheviks in 1917? First and foremost, because there were no political disagreements. The article written by Trotsky in America in March 1917 coincided in their line of thought with Lenin's Letters from Afar, written in Switzerland at the same time. Was this agreement accidental, Comrade Johnstone? To judge from your one-sided presentation of the past polemics between Lenin and Trotsky, no other conclusion is possible. But then, what about the lamentable role played by the "Old Bolsheviks" in this period? These were precisely the men who, in your own words, had "fitted themselves into the ranks" and "submitted to collective discipline" for the previous period; was this also "accidental"? Lenin, in his last letter to the Congress (1923), states that it was not. Nor was it accidental, Comrade Johnstone, that Lenin's most consistent supporter in his fight against the vacillations of the "Old Bolsheviks" in 1917 was none other than Trotsky.

The whole purpose of revolutionary theory, of the building of the revolutionary party, is to carry through a revolution. It is precisely the "storms of revolution", in which the revolutionary movement comes under acute pressure from alien class forces, which puts all theories, men and parties to the decisive test. The reason why the "Old Bolsheviks" failed this test, the reason why they found themselves hopelessly adrift in the storm of revolution, is precisely because, in

the whole of the previous period they had failed to absorb and understand the methods and ideas of Lenin, which were the methods and ideas of revolutionary Marxism.

The “Old Bolsheviks” had been content, in the previous period, to “fit themselves into the ranks”, to follow lamely in the footsteps of Lenin, mechanically repeating his ideas, which in their hands turned into meaningless incantations. The result was that at the decisive moment, when a drastic turn was necessary, they hesitated, “lost their heads”, opposed Lenin … and landed in the camp of Menshevism. Trotsky, on the other hand, who had set out on a different course, arrived at the same conclusions which Lenin had reached by another route. From that moment, all the old disputes were consigned to the rubbish-bin of history … only to be grubbed out again by the Stalinists after Lenin’s death in an attempt to oust Trotsky from the leadership.

From the moment of Trotsky’s arrival in Petrograd in May 1917, he spoke and acted in solidarity with the Bolsheviks. Commenting on this, the Bolshevik Raskolnikov recalled that:

“Leon Davidovich [Trotsky] was not at that time formally a member of our party, but as a matter of fact he worked within it continually from the day of his arrival from America. At any rate, immediately after his first speech in the Soviet, we all looked upon him as one of our party leaders.” (Proletarskaya Revolutsia, 1923, p. 71)

On the controversies of the past, the same writer remarked:

“The echoes of the past disagreements during the pre-war period had completely disappeared. No differences existed between the tactical line of Lenin and Trotsky. That fusion, already observable during the war, was completely and

definitely achieved from the moment of Trotsky's return to Russia. From his first public speech all of us old Leninists felt that he was ours." (ibid., p. 150)

If Trotsky did not immediately formally join the Bolshevik Party, it was not out of any political disagreements (he had announced his willingness to join immediately in discussion with Lenin and his colleagues), but because Trotsky wished to win over the organisation of the Mezhrayontsi ("Inter-District group") which comprised about 4,000 Petrograd workers and many prominent Left figures such as Uritsky, Joffe, Lunacharsky, Ryazanov, Volodarsky and others who later played prominent roles in the Bolshevik Party leadership. On this group, a note to the works of Lenin published in Russia after the revolution states:

"On the war question the Mezhrayontsi occupied an internationalist position, and in their tactics were close to the Bolsheviks." (Works, vol. 14, p. 448)

On the all-Russian Congress of Soviets held in the beginning of June, which was still dominated by Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, E. H. Carr observes that:

"Trotsky and Lunacharsky were among the ten delegates of the 'united social-democrats' who solidly supported the Bolsheviks throughout the three weeks of the congress." (The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 1, p. 89)

In order to speed up the accession of the Mezhrayontsi to the Bolsheviks, which was being opposed by some of the leadership, Trotsky wrote in Pravda the following statement:

“There are in my opinion at the present time [i.e. July] no differences either in principle or in tactics between the Inter-District and the Bolshevik organisations. Accordingly there are no motives which justify the separate existence of these organisations.” (our emphasis)

At this difficult and dangerous time, Trotsky wrote a letter to the Provisional Government, which it is worth quoting in full, in view of the light it sheds on the relations between Trotsky and the Bolsheviks in 1917. The letter is dated 23rd July, 1917:

“Citizen Ministers:

“I have learned that in connection with the events of July 16-17[2], a warrant has been issued for the arrest of Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, but not for me. I should like, therefore, to call your attention to the following:

(1) I agree with the main thesis of Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, and have advocated it in the journal Vpered and in my public speeches.

(2) My attitude toward the events of July 16-17 was the same as theirs.

(a) Kamenev, Zinoviev, and I first learned of the proposed plans of the Machine-Gun and other regiments at the joint meeting of the Bureaus [Executive Committees] on July 16th. We took immediate steps to stop the soldiers from coming out. Zinoviev and Kamenev put themselves in touch with the Bolsheviks, and I with the ‘interward’ organisation [i.e. Mezhrayontsi] to which I belong.

(b) When however, notwithstanding our efforts, the demonstration did take place, my comrade Bolsheviks and I made numerous speeches in front of the Tauride Palace, in which we came out in favour of the main slogan of the crowd: “All Power to the Soviets”, but we, at the same time, called on those demonstrating, both the soldiers and civilians to return to their homes and barracks in a peaceful and orderly manner.

(c) At a conference which took place at the Tauride Palace late in the night of July 16-17 between some Bolsheviks and ward organisations, I supported the motion of Kamenev that everything should be done to prevent a recurrence of the demonstration on July 17th. When, however, it was learned from the agitators, who arrived from the different wards, that the regiments and factory workers had already decided to come out, and that it was impossible to hold back the crowd until the government crisis was over, all those present agreed that the best thing to do was to direct the demonstration along peaceful lines and to ask the masses to leave their guns at home.

(d) In the course of the day of July 17, which I spent in the Tauride Palace, I and the Bolshevik comrades more than once urged this course on the crowd.

(3) The fact that I am not connected with Pravda and am not a member of the Bolshevik Party is not due to political differences, but to certain circumstances in our party history which have now lost all significance.

(4) The attempt of the newspapers to convey the impression that I have ‘nothing to do’ with the Bolsheviks has about as much truth in it as the report that I have asked the authorities to protect me from the ‘violence of the mob’, of the hundreds of other false rumours of that same press.

“From all that I have said, it is clear that you cannot logically exclude me from the warrant of arrest which you have made out for Lenin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev.[3] There can also be no doubt in your minds that I am just as uncompromising a political opponent as the above-named comrades. Leaving me out merely emphasises the counter-revolutionary highhandedness that lies behind the attack on Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev.”

(From The Age of the Permanent Revolution, pp. 98-9, our emphasis)

Throughout this whole period, Trotsky, on dozens of occasions, expressed his agreement with the position of the Bolsheviks. In the most difficult days, when the Party was driven underground, when Lenin and Zinoviev were forced to leave for Finland, when Kamenev was in jail and the Bolsheviks subjected to shameless calumnies as “German agents”, Trotsky spoke out publicly in their defence, and identified his position with theirs. Monty Johnstone knows all this. He knows it and, he passes it over in silence. All he has to say on this is that:

“In his ‘colossal arrogance’ Trotsky appears genuinely to have believed that the Bolshevik Party had become ‘de-bolshevised’ and, on this basis, he moved towards joining it.” (Cogito, p. 14)

The phrase “de-bolshevised” comes, not from Trotsky, but from the “impartial” Isaac Deutscher, “colossal arrogance” comes from Lunacharsky’s Revolutionary Silhouettes, where we read the following:

“Trotsky as a man is prickly and overbearing. However, after Trotsky’s merger with the Bolsheviks, it was only in his attitude to Lenin that Trotsky always showed a touching and tender yieldingness. With the modesty of all truly great men he acknowledges Lenin’s primacy.”

And on page 43 of the same work:

“When Lenin lay wounded – mortally, we feared, no one expressed our feelings about him better than Trotsky. Amid the appalling turmoil of world events it was Trotsky, the other leader of the Russian revolution, a man by no means inclined to sentimentality who said: ‘when you realise that Lenin might die it seems that all our lives are useless and you lose the will to live.’”

We leave it to the reader of these lines to decide on whose part “colossal arrogance” is shown in the portrayal of the relationship between the two greatest revolutionaries of our time.

Two years later, Lenin pointed out that in 1917 “Bolshevism drew to itself all the best elements in the currents of socialist thought that were closest to it.” To whom do these lines refer, Comrade Johnstone? To the Left Mensheviks and Left Social Revolutionaries? But most of those elements had already broken with Bolshevism by 1918. These lines clearly refer to Trotsky and the Mezhrayontsi. The special attitude of Lenin towards the Mezhrayontsi is revealed by the fact that, at a time when he was urging the toughening-up of the conditions of membership to guard against the influx of unreliable elements, the probationary period was waived for the Mezhrayontsi, who were allowed to count the period of their membership of the Bolsheviks from the time they joined their own group.

This action was tantamount to the agreement of the Bolsheviks with the statement of Trotsky that there were no tactical or political differences between the two groups. The very same Congress at which the Mezhrayontsi joined the Bolshevik Party, the “colossally arrogant” Trotsky was elected to the Central Committee, and he was one of the four names (with Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev) which were announced as having polled the highest number of votes

(131 out of 134).

The Stalin School of Falsification

“It would be unhistorical indeed if, in evaluating Trotsky, we were to ignore his struggle against Bolshevism during the first fourteen years of its existence – or consider the matter closed by quoting a remark that Lenin is alleged on Trotsky’s authority – to have made in 1917 (in the midst of the Revolution and after the latter had been in the Party less than four months) to the effect that after he had understood that unity with the Mensheviks was impossible, ‘there was no better Bolshevik than Trotsky.’” (Cogito, p. 8)

Such is the genuflexion, to the Muse of History with which Monty Johnstone ends the first part of his “far-reaching, complicated but profoundly instructive” history of Bolshevism. Being himself so particular in his use of sources, he refuses to admit as evidence a remark “allegedly” made by Lenin “on Trotsky’s authority”. What was this remark and why was it made?

At a meeting of the Petrograd Committee on November 14th, 1917, Lenin spoke on the danger of conciliationist tendencies in the Party leadership which constituted a threat even after the October Revolution. On November 14th, eleven days after the successful insurrection, three members of the Central Committee (Kamenev, Zinoviev, Nogin) resigned in protest against the policies of the Party, and issued an ultimatum demanding the formation of a coalition government including the Mensheviks and the SRs “otherwise the only course that remains is to maintain a purely Bolshevik Government by means of political terror.” They ended their statement with an appeal to the workers for “immediate conciliation” on the basis of their slogan “Long live the government of all Soviet parties!” This crisis in the ranks seemed likely to destroy the whole of the gains made by October. In response to a dangerous situation, Lenin advocated the expulsion of the leading miscreants. It was in this situation that Lenin delivered the speech which ends with the words: “No compromise! A homogeneous

Bolshevik government." In the original text of Lenin's speech the following words occur:

"As for coalition, I cannot speak about that seriously. Trotsky long ago said that a union was impossible. Trotsky understood this, and from that time on there has been no better Bolshevik."

After Lenin's death, the ruling clique: Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev began a systematic campaign of falsification, designed to belittle Trotsky's role in the revolution and to boost their own. To do this, they had to invent the legend of "Trotskyism", to drive a wedge between the position of Trotsky and that of Lenin and the "Leninists" (i.e. themselves). The hack historians burrowed through the accumulated rubbish of old polemics which had long been forgotten by those who participated in them: forgotten, because all the questions which had been raised then were resolved by the experience of October and therefore could have nothing but an abstract, historical interest. But a serious obstacle in the path of the falsifiers was the October Revolution itself. This obstacle was removed by gradually deleting Trotsky's name from the history books, by re-writing history, and finally by the outright suppression of all, even the most innocuous mention, of Trotsky's role.

Monty Johnstone himself cites a good example of this: in the 1934 edition of Stalin's The October Revolution we find the following statement:

"All practical work in connection with the organisation of the uprising was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotsky, the President of the Petrograd Soviet. It can be stated with certainty that the Party is indebted primarily and principally to Comrade Trotsky for the rapid going over of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the efficient manner in which the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee was organised."

“This passage”, writes Monty Johnstone, “has been inexcusably expunged from the text of the article published in Stalin’s Works, Moscow, 1953, IV, p. 157.” (our emphasis)

“Inexcusably expunged” is the language of a man who is surprised and irritated by some minor and unexpected detail. But there is nothing surprising about it, and Comrade Johnstone’s astonishment is entirely feigned. He is well aware that all the writing of Soviet history up to the present time has consisted of nothing but an utterly false and lying account of the Russian Revolution and especially of Trotsky’s role. The distortions of 1924, crass though they were, merely paved the way for the time when Stalin in the place of the above, could write:

“Comrade Trotsky played no particular role either in the party or the October insurrection, and could not do so being a man comparatively new to our party in the October period.” (Stalin’s Works, Moscow, 1953 edition)

This, in turn, was only another step towards the complete degeneration of the Stalinist bureaucracy which accused not only Trotsky, but the entire “Old Bolshevik” leadership of collaborating with German fascism for the overthrow of the Soviet Union. Among other charges made at the time of the infamous Purge Trials of the 30s, Bukharin, whom Lenin described in the suppressed testament as “the Party’s favourite” was accused of plotting to assassinate Lenin in 1918!

The remark which Lenin is “alleged on Trotsky’s authority” to have made was published in the original edition of the minutes of the Petrograd Committee, but subsequently suppressed on the grounds that the speech of Lenin had been copied out incorrectly by the minutes secretary. Undoubtedly, the whole text, as is the case with many of Lenin’s speeches is badly edited, full of gaps and incomplete sentences. But only one page was deleted – the page that contains Lenin’s remark on Trotsky. In his book, The Stalin School of Falsification, Trotsky reproduces a photo-copy of the page in question. The original is in the

Trotsky Archives, together with a great deal of other material which has been suppressed in the Soviet Union. Monty Johnstone does not question the authority of the material. He dare not: it has been attested to, not only by every serious historian of the Russian Revolution, but also by the material published by the Soviet bureaucracy after the Twentieth Congress, including Lenin's suppressed Testament, which was published by the Left Opposition in Russia and by Trotskyists abroad thirty years before the text was made public by the Soviet ruling clique. Naturally, they only published a fraction of the material, which shows Lenin's opposition to Stalin. But a still greater amount remains under lock and key, in the "closed" section of the Lenin Library, available for the scrutiny only of the Party's hack "historians".

The authenticity of Lenin's remark can be seen from the context in which he was speaking. On the question of conciliationism, no one had been so outspoken as Trotsky before the War. Trotsky had believed, on the basis of 1905, that a new revolutionary upheaval would push the best elements among the Mensheviks to the left, enabling unification with the Bolsheviks to come about. Events themselves demonstrated the incorrectness of this position. Trotsky, in 1917, unhesitatingly admitted his mistake and once and for all put out of his mind any idea of reunification with the Mensheviks. The "Old Bolshevik" faction, on the other hand, clung relentlessly to their conciliationist illusions even after the seizure of power. What they were asking for in November 1917 amounted to a restoration, or counter-revolution in a democratic guise. We would ask Monty Johnstone a straight question: who acted more like a Bolshevik in 1917, Trotsky or the self-styled "Old Bolsheviks?" He will not answer. That is of no moment. Lenin gave the answer at the meeting of the Petrograd Committee in November, 1917.

On page 21 of his work, Johnstone quotes from Lenin's last letter to Congress – the famous Suppressed Testament, which was only made available to the rank-and-file of the Communist Parties by the Soviet leaders after the 20th Congress. Johnstone quoted what Lenin has to say about Trotsky's personal characteristics, but omits one sentence which is very relevant to his own work. Lenin, in his last word to the Russian Communist Party, warned that Trotsky's non-Bolshevik past should not be held against him.

Monty Johnstone has spent over half his work digging up all the refuse he can lay his hands upon from the most obscure polemics of the pre-1917 period. But not accidentally he fails to quote Lenin's last word on Trotsky and his relation to the Bolshevik Party, before 1917.

For Lenin, as for Trotsky, the year 1917 marked the decisive turning-point, which rendered all the old polemics with Trotsky irrelevant. That is why Lenin never had occasion to refer to them after 1917. That is also why Trotsky, in 1921, advised Olminsky that the publication of his letter to Chkheidze would be inopportune. Monty Johnstone insinuates, on these grounds that Trotsky was guilty of the same methods of falsification as Stalin!

"When Olminsky, the President of the Commission of Party History, asked him whether it [the letter to Chkheidze] should be published, he replied that this would be 'inopportune' adding paternalistically: 'The reader of today will not understand, will not apply the necessary historical correctives and will simply be confused.' This was precisely the Stalinist motivation for the suppression and falsification of historical documents that was in later years to be so soundly and correctly denounced by Trotsky himself." (Cogito, p. 7, our emphasis)

Since Monty Johnstone has also made not the slightest attempt to explain the historical context of this letter – or any other – his motivation for using it is quite clear. We hope that we have given some idea as to the real "motivation" of Trotsky at this period (1913), his desire for the unity of the Marxist movement. In his book, In Defence of Marxism, Trotsky explains fully the reasons for his stand. Johnstone quotes from this work – but, in the usual "highly selective, potted" manner, only reproduced one phrase, viz: "I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organisational sphere from the traits of a petty bourgeois revolutionist." Let us reproduce Trotsky's words without "convenient" abridgements:

“I have in mind the so-called August bloc of 1912. I participated actively in this bloc. In a sense I created it. Politically I differed with the Mensheviks on all fundamental questions. I also differed with the ultra-left Bolsheviks, the Vperyodists. In the general tendency of politics I stood far more closely with the Bolsheviks. But I was against the Leninist ‘regime’ because I had not yet learned to understand that in order to realise the revolutionary goal a firmly welded centralised party is indispensable. And so I formed this episodic bloc consisting of heterogeneous elements which was directed against the proletarian wing of the party.

“In the August bloc the liquidators had their own faction, the Vperyodists also had something resembling a faction. Most of the documents were written by me and through avoiding principled differences had as their aim the creation of a semblance of unanimity upon ‘concrete political questions’. Not a word about the past! Lenin subjected the August bloc to merciless criticism and the harshest blows fell to my lot. Lenin proved that inasmuch as I did not agree politically with either the Mensheviks or the Vperyodists my policy was adventurism. This was severe but it was true.

“As ‘mitigating circumstances’ let me mention the fact that I had set as my task not to support the right or the ultra-left factions against the Bolsheviks but to unite the party as a whole. The Bolsheviks too were invited to the August conference. But since Lenin flatly refused to unite with the Mensheviks (in which-he was completely correct) I was left in an unnatural bloc with the Mensheviks and the Vperyodists. The second mitigating circumstance is this, that the very phenomenon of Bolshevism as the genuine revolutionary party was then developing for the first time – in the practice of the Second International there were no precedents. But I do not thereby seek in the least to absolve myself from guilt. Notwithstanding the conception of permanent revolution which undoubtedly disclosed the correct perspective, I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organisational sphere from the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist. I was sick with the disease of conciliationism towards Menshevism and with a distrustful attitude toward Leninist centralism. Immediately after the August conference the bloc began to disintegrate into its component parts. Within a few months I was not only in principle but organisationally outside the

bloc.” (In Defence of Marxism, p. 141)

Thus, straightforwardly, honestly, Trotsky reveals, and explains his own mistakes. Johnstone, of course, has no interest in letting Trotsky speak for himself, but merely seizes upon isolated phrases (“disease of conciliationism”, “petit-bourgeois revolutionist”) which he uses in a thoroughly unscrupulous, thoroughly Stalinist manner. He attempts an amalgam (the favourite device of Stalinist falsification) between Stalin and Trotsky which is beneath contempt. His “motivation” is twofold: on the one hand to blacken Trotsky’s name as a liar and a falsifier who deliberately concealed his past differences with Lenin[!]; on the other, an even more dastardly attempt to prettify the bloody horrors of the Stalinist frame-ups, built out of the bones and nervous systems of human beings, by placing them on the same level as Trotsky’s letter to Olminsky!

Monty Johnstone seizes upon this letter in order to underline his arguments about Trotsky’s “violent opposition” to Lenin. And some of the expressions Trotsky uses appear to bear him out. Yet the use to which Johnstone puts this letter completely bears out what Trotsky wrote to Olminsky – that the reader would not understand the circumstances under which the letter was written, that he would draw the wrong conclusions – precisely the false conclusions which Monty Johnstone invites his reader to draw today.

When did Trotsky write this letter and why? Trotsky himself explains in My Life:

“My letter to Chkheidze against Lenin was published during this period. This episode, dating back to April, 1913, grew out of the fact that the official Bolshevik newspaper then published in St. Petersburg had appropriated the title of my Viennese publication, “The Pravda – a Labour Paper”. This led to one of those sharp conflicts so frequent in the lives of the foreign exiles. In a letter written to Chkheidze, who at one time stood between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, I gave vent to my indignation at the Bolshevik centre and Lenin.

Two or three weeks later, I would undoubtedly have subjected my letter to a strict censor's revision, a year or two later still it would have seemed a curiosity in my own eyes. But that letter was to have a peculiar destiny. It was intercepted on its way by the Police Department. It rested in the police archives until the October revolution, when it went to the Institute of History of the Communist Party. Lenin was well aware of this letter; in his eyes, as in mine, it was simply "the snows of yesteryear" and nothing more. A good many letters of various kinds had been written during the years of foreign exile! In 1924, the epigones disinterred the letter from the archives and flung it at the party, three-quarters of which at that time consisted of new members. It was no accident that the time chosen for this was the months immediately following Lenin's death. This condition was doubly essential. In the first place, Lenin could no longer rise to call these gentlemen by their right names, and in the second place, the masses of the people were torn with grief over the death of their leader. With no idea of the yesterdays of the party, the people read Trotsky's hostile remarks about Lenin and were stunned. It is true that the remarks had been made twelve years before, but chronology was disregarded in the face of the naked quotations. The use that the epigones made of my letter to Chkheidze is one of the greatest frauds in the world's history. The forged documents of the French reactionaries in the Dreyfus case are nothing compared to the political forgery perpetrated by Stalin and his associates." (My Life, pp. 515-6)

The use to which the Stalinists put this letter is just one of countless examples of the vile method of the frame-up which they have developed to a fine art. We can say that many of the expressions used in that letter, and which Monty Johnstone eagerly seizes upon, were hot-headed and wrong. But there is all the difference in the world between words uttered in a sudden moment of anger or in the heat of a polemic, and the cold-blooded, deliberate and malicious smears of the Stalinists. Monty Johnstone throws up his hands in pious indignation at the frame-up methods of Stalin's purges. But he does not hesitate to fall back upon the earlier falsifications cooked up by the Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin clique after Lenin's death. In repeating these malicious lies and falsification, Monty Johnstone, far from breaking with the methods of Stalin, resurrects them in a new and more "respectable" guise. They do not smell any sweeter for that.

Monty Johnstone's "case" against Trotsky is neither new nor original. It makes a return from the utterly discredited, "Trotsky-fascist" filth of the thirties, to the more "subtle" pseudo-political arguments of the first period of the rise of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, in 1924-29. At that time the events of October 1917 were still too fresh in people's minds to immediately accuse Trotsky of being an agent of German imperialism and Bukharin of attempting to assassinate Lenin in 1918. Instead, the Soviet literary hacks were encouraged to rummage around in the archives, to dig up precisely the same arguments about Trotsky's "violent opposition" to the Bolshevik Party which Monty Johnstone now parades as his unique contribution to historical science. Since Monty Johnstone has added nothing to these clapped-out hypocritical distortions of forty years ago it is fitting to allow Trotsky to answer his own defence, exactly as he did in his letter to the Bureau of Party History in 1924:

"As I have many times stated, in my disagreements with Bolshevism upon a series of fundamental questions, the error was on my side. In order to outline, approximately in a few words, the nature and extent of those former disagreements of mine with Bolshevism, I will say this: During the time when I stood outside the Bolshevik party, during that period when my differences with Bolshevism reached their highest point, the distance separating me from the views of Lenin was never as great as the distance which separates the present position of Stalin-Bukharin from the very foundations of Marxism and Leninism."

Notes

[1] The notes of the Russian edition of the minutes of this Congress, published in 1959, state that: "In fact, Trotsky supported the Mensheviks on every basic question." (Pyatji S'yezd RSDRP Protokoly, p. 812)

[2] “The events of July 16-17”: The reference is to the armed demonstration organised by anti-Kerensky units of the army, notably the Machine-Gun regiment. The Bolsheviks tried to persuade the soldiers that their action was premature but failed to prevent the demonstration from taking place. The action of the soldiers is used by Kerensky and Co. to prepare to suppress the Bolsheviks, in the reaction of the July Days.

[3] The authorities drew the necessary conclusion and arrested Trotsky shortly afterwards.

4. The Theory of The Permanent Revolution

Monty Johnstone devotes no fewer than eight pages of his work (about a quarter of the whole) to an “exposure” of Trotsky’s theory of the permanent revolution, to which he counterposes Lenin’s idea of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”. These theories were first advanced in 1904-5, and received a striking confirmation on the basis of the revolutionary experiences of 1905. We have already seen the importance of the ideas in the debates in Russian Marxism before 1914. Monty Johnstone devotes not a sentence to all this. He evidently considers that the average Young Communist Leaguer is “not interested” in the ideological struggles of the formative years of Bolshevism. In this, we differ from Comrade Johnstone. We do not confine our analysis to “highly selective, potted” quotations, torn from their contexts, because we are sure that all serious Young Communist League and Communist Party members, and all thinking members of the Labour movement generally, want to know the truth about these questions. What exactly were the differences all about?

Monty Johnstone portrays the question as though the main difference was between the positions of Lenin and Trotsky. He hastily skates past the position of the Mensheviks, and thus presents the whole discussion in an entirely false light. Let us examine the three positions and see in what relation they stood to each other.

All three tendencies agreed that the coming revolution would be a bourgeois-democratic revolution, i.e. a revolution produced by the contradiction between the developing capitalist economy and the semi-feudal autocratic state of Tsarism. But the mere general admission of the bourgeois nature of the revolution could not answer the concrete question of which class would lead the revolutionary struggle against autocracy. The Mensheviks assumed by analogy with the great bourgeois revolutions of the past, that the revolution would be led by the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois democrats, whom the workers’ movement would support.

Lenin, on the other hand, mercilessly criticised the Mensheviks for holding back the independent movement of the workers and poured scorn on their attempts to curry favour with the “progressive” bourgeoisie. Already in 1848, Marx noted that the German bourgeois “revolutionary democracy” was unable to play a revolutionary role in the struggle against feudalism, with which it preferred to do a deal out of fear of the revolutionary movement of the workers. It was at this point that Marx himself first advanced the slogan of “Permanent Revolution”.

Following in the footsteps of Marx, who had described the bourgeois “democratic party” as “far more dangerous to the workers than the previous liberals”, Lenin explained that the Russian bourgeoisie, far from being an ally of the workers, would inevitably side with the counterrevolution.

“The bourgeoisie in the mass,” he wrote in 1905, “will inevitably turn towards the counter-revolution, towards the autocracy, against the revolution, and against the people, as soon as its narrow, selfish interests are met, as soon as it ‘recoils’ from consistent democracy (and it is already recoiling from it!)” (Works, vol. 9, p. 98)

What class, in Lenin’s view, could lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution?

“There remains ‘the people’, that is the proletariat and the peasantry. The proletariat alone can be relied on to march on to the end, for it goes far beyond the democratic revolution. That is why the proletariat fights in the forefront for a republic and contemptuously rejects stupid and unworthy advice to take into account the possibility of the bourgeoisie recoiling.” (ibid.)

Whom are these words directed against? Trotsky and the Permanent Revolution?

Let us see what Trotsky was writing at the same time as Lenin:

“This results in the fact that the struggle for the interests of all Russia has fallen to the lot of the only now existing strong class in the country, the industrial proletariat. For this reason the industrial proletariat has tremendous political importance, and for this reason the struggle for the emancipation of Russia from the incubus of absolutism which is stifling it has become converted into a single combat between absolutism and the industrial proletariat a single combat in which the peasants may render considerable support but cannot play a leading role.” (Results and Prospects, p. 198)

Again:

“Arming the revolution, in Russia, means first and foremost arming the workers. Knowing this, and fearing this, the liberals altogether eschew a militia. They even surrender their position to absolutism without a fight just as the bourgeois Thiers surrendered Paris and France to Bismarck simply to avoid arming the workers.” (ibid., p. 193)

On the question of the attitude to the bourgeois parties (as we have already seen) the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky were in complete solidarity as against the Mensheviks who hid behind the bourgeois nature of the revolution as a cloak for the subordination of the workers’ party to the bourgeoisie. Arguing against class collaboration, both Lenin and Trotsky explained that only the working class, in alliance with the peasant masses, could carry out the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Following the entirely false account in Deutscher’s Prophet Armed Monty Johnstone reproduces all the old nonsense that Trotsky’s views on the permanent revolution derived from Parvus, the famous German Social Democrat, whose

slogan “No Tsar but a workers’ government”, Lenin criticised on a number of occasions. At no time was any such slogan put forward by Trotsky, who, time and again, both before and after 1905, pointed out the bourgeois democratic nature of the revolution.

The point at issue in the debates in Russian Social Democracy was not the nature of the revolution (no one disputed that) but which class would lead it. On this question, two clearly defined trends crystallised in Russian Social Democracy: on the one hand, the Mensheviks, who, repeating like the litany that the revolution was “bourgeois”, sought to compromise the Marxist movement by agreements with the “liberals”; on the other hand, those who pointed to the weakness, cowardice and treachery of the bourgeoisie and demanded independent action by the masses, under the leadership of the only consistent revolutionary class, the proletariat – if necessary against the bourgeoisie. These were the famous Two Tactics of Social Democracy which Lenin deals with in his pamphlet from which Monty Johnstone quotes, and which he mangles beyond recognition.

Johnstone really scrapes the bottom of the barrel, when he drags up the old slander that Trotsky’s theory ignored the role of the peasantry in the revolution. Johnstone repeats the distortion of Stalin that Trotsky in 1905 “simply forgot all about the peasantry as a revolutionary force, and advanced the slogan of ‘No Tsar, but a workers’ government’, that is the slogan of a revolution without the peasantry.” (Stalin, Works, vol. 4, p. 392)

Stalin, and now Monty Johnstone, “simply forgot” about the slogan which Trotsky actually advanced in 1905. Neither Tsar nor Zemtsi (i.e. liberals), but the People! i.e. a slogan embracing the workers and peasants. The leaflet in which this occurs is to be found, along with numerous appeals to the very peasantry which Trotsky “forgot”, in Trotsky’s Collected Works (vol. 2, p. 256) which were printed in Russia after the October Revolution.

Lenin’s Internationalism

What was Lenin’s attitude towards the peasantry in the revolution? He argued that the peasantry should be mobilised by the workers in order to carry through the democratic, anti-feudal tasks. The moment the workers begin to press forward to socialism, the class antagonisms begin to assert themselves, the reactionary Bonapartist tendencies among the peasantry, which Lenin repeatedly warned against, would be turned against the proletariat. In a country where the overwhelming majority of the population consisted of peasants the struggle for socialism would encounter the most serious and determined opposition from the wealthier strata of the peasantry. Yet, according to Monty Johnstone, Lenin, in 1905 already envisaged the “growing over” of the democratic revolution in Russia to socialism:

“Whilst in this period Lenin spoke of the beginning of the struggle for socialist revolution following a ‘complete victory’ of the democratic revolution, with the ‘achievement of the demands of the present-day peasantry’, and undoubtedly [!] did not expect the socialist revolution to follow within eight months of its precursor, he considered the main factor determining the point of transition from one to the other to be ‘the degree of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat’. History proved that he was right to reject Trotsky’s strategy which envisaged essentially [?] a leap [?] from Tsarism to October, skipping February. [!]” (Cogito, p. 13)

Monty Johnstone is wriggling uncomfortably on a hook cast by himself to trap Trotsky! The assertion that the theory of permanent revolution consists “essentially” of a “leap” from Tsarism to the socialist revolution, without any intermediate phase is arrant nonsense which proves only that Monty Johnstone has either not bothered to read Trotsky, or else is back to his old “objective, scientific” methods. We would like to ask Monty Johnstone, apart from anything

else, wherein lies the “permanent”, “uninterrupted” nature of the revolution if all that is involved is… a “leap” from Tsarism to socialism?

Not satisfied with distorting Trotsky’s position in 1905, Monty Johnstone tries to have a go at Lenin, as well! He makes him say things in crying contradiction to his own analysis, reducing the leader of October to a buffoon. On the one hand, Johnstone repeats ad nauseam that Lenin regarded the revolution as bourgeois (to no avail, since, everyone except the Stalinist epigones of Lenin, is agreed on this). On the other, he attributes to Lenin in 1905 the idea that the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” would “grow over” into the dictatorship of the proletariat! Let us see what Lenin actually did say on the question of the class nature of the “democratic dictatorship”:

“But of course it will be a democratic, not a socialist dictatorship. It will be unable (without a series of intermediary stages of revolutionary development) to affect the foundations of capitalism. At best, it may bring about a radical redistribution of landed property in favour of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy, including the formation of a republic, eradicate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage … lay the foundations for a thorough improvement in the conditions of the workers and for a rise in their standard of living, and – last but not least – carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe.” (Works, vol. 9, p. 57)

Lenin’s position is absolutely clear and unambiguous: the coming revolution will be a bourgeois revolution, led by the proletariat in alliance with the peasant masses. The best that can be expected of it is the fulfilment of basic bourgeois-democratic tasks: distribution of land to the peasants, a democratic republic, etc. This, of necessity, since any attempt to “affect the foundations of capitalism” would necessarily bring the proletariat into conflict with the mass of peasant small proprietors. Lenin hammers the point home: “The democratic revolution is bourgeois in nature. The slogan of a general distribution, or ‘land and freedom’ is a bourgeois slogan.” (ibid., p. 112)

And for Lenin, no other outcome was possible on the basis of a backward, semi-feudal country like Russia. To talk about the "growing over" of the democratic dictatorship to the socialist revolution is to make nonsense of Lenin's whole analysis of the class correlation of forces in the revolution.

In what sense did Lenin refer to the possibility of socialist revolution in Russia? In the above quotation from Two Tactics, Lenin asserts that the Russian revolution will not be able to affect the foundations of capitalism "without a series of intermediary stages of revolutionary developments." Monty Johnstone quickly butts in to fill in the missing link for Lenin: the prerequisite for the transition from the democratic to the socialist revolution is: "the degree of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat", and adds that history proved Lenin right. History indeed proved Lenin right, Comrade Johnstone, but not for something which he did not say. Let us dispense with the interpreting service of Monty Johnstone, and let Lenin speak for himself.

Lenin continues the above quotation as follows; the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia will:

"last but not least carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe. Such a victory will not yet by any means transform our bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution; the democratic revolution will not immediately overstep the bounds of bourgeois social and economic relationships, nevertheless, the significance of such a victory for the future development of Russia and for the whole world will be immense. Nothing will raise the revolutionary energy of the world proletariat so much, nothing will shorten the path leading to its complete victory to such an extent, as this decisive victory of the revolution that has now started in Russia." (ibid., p. 57)

Lenin's internationalism here stands out boldly in every line. It is an internationalism, not of words, but of deeds – a far cry from the holiday speeches of the present day Labour and Stalinist leaders. For Lenin, the Russian

revolution was not a self-sufficient act, a “Russian Road to Socialism”! It was the beginning of the world proletarian revolution. Precisely in this fact lay the future possibility of the transformation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution in Russia.

Neither Lenin, nor any other Marxist, seriously entertained the idea that it was possible to build “socialism in a single country”, much less in a backward, Asiatic, peasant country like Russia. Elsewhere Lenin explains, what would be ABC for any Marxist, that the conditions for a socialist transformation of society were absent in Russia, although they were fully matured in Western Europe. Polemicising against the Mensheviks in Two Tactics, Lenin reiterates the classical position of Marxism on the international significance of the Russian revolution:

“The basic idea here is one repeatedly formulated by Vperyod [Lenin’s paper] which has stated that we must not be afraid … of Social Democracy’s complete victory in a democratic revolution, i.e. of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, for such a victory will enable us to rouse Europe; after throwing off the yoke of the bourgeoisie, the socialist proletariat in Europe will in its turn help us to accomplish the socialist revolution.” (ibid., p. 82, our emphasis)

This is the crux of Lenin’s prognosis of the coming revolution in Russia: the revolution can only be bourgeois-democratic (not socialist) but, at the same time, because the bourgeoisie is unfit to play a revolutionary role, the revolution can only be carried out by the working class, led by the Social-Democracy, which will rouse the peasant masses in its support. The overthrow of Tsarism, the uprooting of all traces of feudalism, and the creation of a republic will have a tremendously revolutionising effect on the proletariat of the advanced countries of Western Europe. But the revolution in the West can only be a socialist revolution, because of the tremendous development of the productive forces built up under capitalism itself, and the enormous strength of the working class and the labour movement in these countries. Finally, the socialist revolution in

the West will provoke further upheavals in Russia, and, with the assistance of the socialist proletariat of Europe, the Russian workers will transform the democratic revolution, in the teeth of opposition from the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary peasantry, into a socialist revolution.

Comrade Johnstone shakes his head furiously. “That is not Leninism, but Trotskyism! You have distorted Lenin’s meaning!” Not at all, Comrade Johnstone. The meaning is quite clear. Let Lenin speak for himself:

“Thus, at this stage, [after the final victory of the “democratic dictatorship”] the liberal bourgeoisie and the well-to-do peasantry plus partly the middle peasantry organise counter-revolution. The Russian proletariat plus the European proletariat organise revolution.

“In such conditions the Russian proletariat can win a second victory. The cause is no longer hopeless. The second victory will be the socialist revolution in Europe.

“The European workers will then show us ‘how to do it’, and then together with them we shall bring about the socialist revolution.” (Works, vol. 10, p. 92)

Here and on dozens of other occasions Lenin expressed himself with the utmost clarity that the victory of “our great bourgeois revolution … will usher in the era of socialist revolution in the West.” (Works, vol. 10, p. 276, our emphasis) No matter how he twists and turns, and tries to put words into Lenin’s mouth, Monty Johnstone cannot alter the fact that, in 1905, Lenin not only rejected the idea of the “building of socialism in Russia alone” (the very idea would not have entered his head), but even the possibility of the Russian workers establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat before the socialist revolution in the West.

Lenin and Trotsky

What were the differences between Lenin's ideas and those of Trotsky's? As we have seen, both agreed on the fundamental questions of the revolution: the counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie; the need for the workers and peasants to carry through the democratic revolution; the international significance of the revolution, and so on. The differences arose from Lenin's characterisation of the revolutionary-democratic government which would carry through the tasks of the revolution as the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".

Trotsky criticised this formulation for its vagueness; that it did not make clear which class would exercise the dictatorship. Lenin's vagueness was intentional. He was not prepared to say in advance what form the revolutionary dictatorship would take. He did not even preclude the possibility that the peasant elements would predominate in the coalition. Thus, from the outset, the formula "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" bore an intentionally algebraic character – with a number of unknown quantities to be filled in by history. In Two Tactics, Lenin explained that:

"The time will come when the struggle against the Russian autocracy will end, and the period of democratic revolution will have passed in Russia, it will then be ridiculous even to speak of 'singleness of will' of the proletariat and peasantry, about a democratic dictatorship, etc. When that time comes we shall deal with the question of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, and speak of it in greater detail." (Works, vol. 9, p. 86)

To this idea of Lenin, Trotsky replied that at no time in history had the peasantry ever been able to play an independent role. The fate of the Russian revolution

would be decided by the outcome of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat for the leadership of the peasant masses. The peasantry could either be used as an instrument of revolution or of reaction. At all events, the only possible outcome of the revolution was either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which would fall into the arms of Tsarist reaction, or the dictatorship of the proletariat, in alliance with the poor peasantry.

A revolutionary government, in which the workers predominated under the banner of Marxism, could not stop half way, confining itself to bourgeois tasks, but would necessarily pass from the tasks of the democratic revolution to the socialist. In order to survive, the revolutionary dictatorship would have to wage war against reaction within the country and externally. Thereafter, Trotsky agreed with Lenin, the victory of the Russian revolution would provide a tremendous impetus to the socialist revolution in the West, which would come to the aid of the Russian workers' state and carry through the socialist transformation.

This, then, was the heinous crime of Trotsky and his theory of the permanent revolution in 1905! This it was, according to Monty Johnstone, that put him "outside the party"… to predict in advance what actually happened in 1917: to explain that the logic of events would inevitably place the working class in power! Not even Lenin was prepared to commit himself on this question in 1905, as we have seen.

Of all the Marxists, Trotsky alone foresaw the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia before the socialist revolution in the West:

"It is possible [wrote Trotsky in 1905] for the workers to come to power in an economically backward country sooner than in an advanced country … In our view, the Russian revolution will create conditions in which power can pass into the hands of the workers … and in the event of the victory of the revolution it must do so … before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism get the chance to

display to the full their talents for governing." (Results and Prospects, p. 195)

Did this mean, as Monty Johnstone asserts, that Trotsky denied the bourgeois nature of the revolution? Trotsky himself explains:

"In the revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, the direct objective tasks of which are also bourgeois [our emphasis], there emerges as a near prospect the inevitable, or at least the probable, political domination of the proletariat. The proletariat itself will see to it that this domination does not become a mere passing 'episode', as some realist philistines hope. But we can even now ask ourselves: is it inevitable that the proletarian dictatorship should be shattered against the barriers of the bourgeois revolution? Or is it possible in the given world-historical conditions, that it may discover before it the prospect of breaking through these barriers? Here we are confronted by questions of tactics: should we consciously work towards a working-class government in proportion as the development of the revolution brings this stage nearer, or must we at that moment regard political power as a misfortune which the bourgeois revolution is ready to thrust upon the workers, and which it would be better to avoid?" (Results and Prospects, pp. 199-200, our emphasis)

Are these lines of Trotsky really directed against Lenin, Comrade Johnstone? Or are they aimed at the "realist philistines", like Plekhanov, who feared the consequences of the independent movement of the workers? And where, here, is the "leap" from Tsarism to the socialist revolution, which, Comrade Johnstone assures us, constitutes the crux of the theory of permanent revolution?

Trotsky's prognosis of 1905 boils down to this: the bourgeoisie in Russia is incapable of playing a revolutionary role. Inevitably, the development of the revolution must, at some stage, result in the seizure of power by the workers, supported by a section of the peasantry. Only a workers' and peasants' government can solve the historical tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. But once in power, the proletariat will not relinquish it to the

bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie. It must consolidate its hold on power by passing from bourgeois-democratic tasks to socialist measures. In other words the revolutionary government, in Trotsky's view, could take no form other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. It must carry on a ruthless fight against internal reaction, and, to do this it must rouse the socialist workers of the West to its support. Trotsky, like Lenin, defended the ideas of Marxist internationalism against the parochial arguments of the Mensheviks. To the opportunist thesis that the "conditions for socialism did not exist in Russia" and that therefore the revolution should be confined to bourgeois limits, Trotsky and Lenin emphasised that the conditions for socialism were fully mature on a world scale. Both these great Marxists conceived of the Russian revolution as merely the first link in the international socialist revolution.

The Permanent Revolution in Practice (1)

All the theories concerning the nature of the Russian revolution which had been advanced by Marxists before 1917 were necessarily of a more or less general and conditional nature. They were not blueprints or astrological predictions, but prognoses, intended to provide the movement with a guide to action, a perspective, which is the basic task of Marxist theory.

The correctness, or otherwise, of these theories can be gauged, not by a perusal of the polemics of 1905, but only in the light of what actually happened. Engels was very fond of the proverb, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating”, while Lenin frequently cited the words of Goethe: “Theory is grey, my friend, but the tree of life is ever green”. For a Marxist, therefore, the proof of any revolutionary theory can only be the experience of revolution itself.

The experience of 1917 strikingly confirmed the prognosis of Lenin and Trotsky on the cowardly, counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie, as manifested in the actions of the Provisional Government, which came to power after the February revolution. It is characteristic of their profound grasp of Marxist method that both Lenin and Trotsky, independently of each other, immediately understood the significance of the Kerensky regime and the attitude which the workers should adopt towards it. Lenin, in Switzerland, and Trotsky, in New York, simultaneously came to the same conclusion, i.e. of the need for implacable opposition towards the bourgeois Provisional Government, and its overthrow by the working class.

What was the position of the “Old Bolsheviks” who played such an “important role” in the year 1917? Every single one of them advocated support for the Provisional Government. Of all the cadres of Bolshevism, who, in the words of

Monty Johnstone, had “fitted themselves into the ranks” and “submitted themselves to collective discipline” for a whole period, not one stood up to the decisive test of events. We would ask Monty Johnstone: What was all the preparation of the last period for: What was the point of Lenin’s struggle for “thirteen or fourteen years” to build a “stable disciplined Marxist party” if at the crucial moment all the “old Bolsheviks” failed to rise to the occasion?

As early as 1909, Trotsky wrote:

“If the Mensheviks, starting from the abstraction, ‘our revolution is bourgeois’ arrive at the idea of adapting the whole tactics of the proletariat to the behaviour of the liberal bourgeoisie before the conquest of state power, the Bolsheviks, proceeding, from an equally barren abstraction, ‘a democratic, not a socialist, dictatorship’, arrive at the idea of a bourgeois-democratic self-limitation of the proletariat in whose hands state power rests. It is true, there is a very significant difference between them in this respect: while the anti-revolutionary sides of Menshevism are already displayed in full force now, the anti-revolutionary traits of Bolshevism threaten enormous danger only in the event of a revolutionary victory.” (Trotsky, 1905, p. 285)

Monty Johnstone, severing the last two lines of this passage, tries to use them as further proof of Trotsky’s hostility to Lenin’s position. In fact, with these words, Trotsky correctly anticipated in 1909 the crisis in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party in 1917, which resulted entirely from the anti-revolutionary interpretation by the “Old Bolsheviks” of Lenin’s slogan “the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry“.

When Lenin presented his famous April Theses to the party, in which he called for the overthrow of the Provisional Government, they were published in his name alone: not one of the “leaders” of the party was prepared to associate his name with a position which ran directly counter to all the statements, manifestos, articles and speeches issued by them since the February revolution. The very day

after the publication of Lenin's theses Kamenev wrote an editorial in Pravda under the heading 'Our Differences', in which it was emphasised that the theses represented only Lenin's "personal opinion". The article ended with the following words:

"Insofar as concerns Lenin's general scheme, it appears to be unacceptable, since it starts from the assumption that the bourgeois revolution is finished and counts on the immediate transformation of the revolution into a socialist revolution."

Note these words well, reader: this is not Lenin arguing against Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, but the "Old Bolshevik" Kamenev indicting Lenin for the heinous crime of Trotskyism! The arguments of Kamenev and Co. in 1917 read like a parody of the words of Plekhanov at the Stockholm Congress of 1906: the proletariat is bound to take power in a proletarian revolution, but the revolution is bourgeois and therefore it is our duty not to take power! The wheel had gone full circle, and the "confusion" of the "Old Bolsheviks" manifested itself in 1911 in a return to the threadbare reformist ideas of the Mensheviks. The "algebraic equation" of Lenin laid itself open to such misinterpretation, while Trotsky's "arithmetical" formula was quite precise.

Marx long ago noted that opportunism often attempts to cloak itself in the garb of outworn revolutionary slogans, slogans which have outlived their revolutionary usefulness. So it was in 1917 with the "Old Bolsheviks", who attempted to use the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" as a mask to conceal their opportunism. It was in this context that Lenin wrote that:

"The Bolshevik slogans and ideas in general have been fully corroborated by history; but concretely, things have turned out differently than could have been anticipated (by anyone): they are more original, more specific, more variegated … 'The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' has already become a reality. in a certain form and to a certain extent, in the Russian

revolution.” (Quoted by Monty Johnstone, p. 11, Lenin, Selected Works, vol. 6, p. 33)

Monty Johnstone reproduces this passage, without explaining the context, in order to prove that Lenin continued to defend the idea of the “democratic dictatorship” in 1917. But the entire work from which the quotation is taken – Letters on Tactics – is a polemic against Kamenev and Co. designed to prove precisely the opposite! Monty Johnstone’s quotation is inaccurate. He joins two ideas together, which, in the original, are separated by a whole paragraph, which runs as follows:

“Had we forgotten this fact, we should have resembled those “Old Bolsheviks” who have more than once played so sorry a role in the history of our party by repeating a formula meaninglessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific formula and new features of actual reality.” (ibid., Lenin’s emphasis)

This little paragraph which Johnstone “accidentally” left out of the middle of his quotation puts the whole matter in a nutshell. Lenin tried to explain to the “Old Bolsheviks” that the slogan of the “democratic dictatorship” was not some “super-historical formula” to be incanted at every junction, regardless of the actual development of the class struggle.

Lenin repeatedly emphasised that there is no abstract truth, but only concrete truth. To attempt to seek salvation in the reiteration of a slogan which had outlived its usefulness was to break with the method of Marxism, and to retreat from the imperative tasks of the revolution to barren scholasticism. The concrete realisation of the “democratic dictatorship” which history had actually thrown up was a capitalist government, waging an imperialist war of annexation, incapable of solving, or even of seriously posing, a single one of the fundamental tasks of the democratic revolution. The algebraic formula of the “democratic dictatorship” had been filled by history with a negative content.

By a series of twists and turns, Monty Johnstone tries to explain that the Kerensky government represented a realisation of the bourgeois democratic dictatorship, as foreseen by Lenin in 1905. But just a minute, Comrade Johnstone! What were the tasks of the democratic dictatorship outlined by Lenin in Two Tactics? First and foremost, a radical solution of the agrarian problem, based on nationalisation of the land; second, a democratic republic based on universal suffrage and a Constituent Assembly; replacement of the standing army by the armed people. To these must be added, in the conditions prevailing in 1917, the immediate conclusion of a democratic peace. Is that not so, Comrade Johnstone? But then, if the Kerensky government was the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" (i.e. the government of the bourgeois-democratic revolution), how is it that not one of these basic tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution were solved by it, or could be solved by it?

Monty Johnstone, tying himself and his readers in knots, argues that the February revolution was the bourgeois-democratic revolution (and that "Trotsky does not attempt to deny this"), but at the same time, that it could not solve a single one of the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Indeed, Comrade Johnstone, Trotsky would not attempt to deny this. Both Lenin and Trotsky understood that the Kerensky government could not seriously tackle these problems; but that was precisely because it was a government of the bourgeoisie, not of the workers and peasants. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat, in alliance with the poor peasants, could begin to solve the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia.

By a most peculiar mode of reasoning (to put it politely) Monty Johnstone argues that:

"The February revolution of 1917 was not the proletariat fighting the bourgeois nation as foreseen by Trotsky, but the overthrow of Tsarism by a bourgeois revolution carried through by the workers and peasants, that Lenin had foreseen. Power did not pass into the hands of a workers' government. It was shared

between Soviets (councils) of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, representing the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry [!] (the bulk of the soldiers were peasants) and the capitalist Provisional Government to which it was voluntarily [!!] surrendering its supremacy." (Cogito, p. 11)

This is fine indeed! The February revolution was a bourgeois revolution carried out by the workers and peasants who then proceeded "voluntarily" to hand over their supremacy to the capitalists. But the question is: how did the workers and peasants come to hand over power "voluntarily", to the bourgeoisie, which, "as foreseen by Lenin", was bound to play, and did play, a counter-revolutionary role? The answer is given by Lenin himself. In answer to those elements who asserted that the proletariat had to obey the "iron law of historical stages", could not "skip February", had to "pass through the stage of the bourgeois revolution", and who thereby tried to cover up their own cowardice, confusion and impotence by appealing to "objective factors", Lenin replied scornfully.

"Why don't they take power? Steklov says: for this reason and that. This is nonsense. The fact is that the proletariat is not organised and class conscious enough. This must be admitted: material strength is in the hands of the proletariat but the bourgeoisie turned out to be prepared and class conscious. This is a monstrous fact, and it should be frankly and openly admitted and the people should be told that they did not take power because they were unorganised and not conscious enough." (Lenin, Works, vol. 36, p. 437, our emphasis)

There was no objective reason why the workers – who held power in their hands – could not have elbowed the bourgeoisie to one side in February 1917, no reason other than unpreparedness, lack of organisation and lack of consciousness. But this, as Lenin explained, was merely the obverse side of the colossal betrayal of the revolution by all the so-called workers' and peasants' parties. Without the complicity of the Mensheviks and SRs in the Soviets, the Provisional Government could not have lasted even for an hour. That is why Lenin reserved his most stinging barbs for those elements among the Bolshevik

leadership who had got the Bolshevik Party itself into tow with the Menshevik-SR bandwagon, which had confused and disorientated the masses, and deflected them from the road to power.

In attempting to discredit the position of Trotsky, which was now identical with that of Lenin, Monty Johnstone merely repeats all the old nonsense which Kamenev and Co. used against Lenin in 1917. His attempts to maintain the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship" in opposition to the permanent revolution is so transparently dishonest as to verge on the comical. Thus, the very work from which he tries to scrape quotations in defence of this slogan – Letters on Tactics – is precisely the one in which Lenin finally buried it once and for all:

"Whoever speaks now of a 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' is behind the times, has consequently gone over to the side of the petty bourgeoisie and is against the proletarian class struggle. He deserves to be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques (which might be called the archive of 'old Bolsheviks')." (Lenin, 'Letters on Tactics', Selected Works, vol. 6, p. 34)

Referring to the power of the working class, and the impotence of the Provisional Government, Lenin pointed out:

"This fact does not fit into the old scheme. One must know how to adapt schemes to facts, rather than repeat words regarding a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' … in general words which have become meaningless." (Lenin, Selected Works, vol. 6, p. 35)

Again:

“Is this reality covered by the old-Bolshevik formula of Comrade Kamenev, which declares that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is not completed? No, that formula is antiquated. It is worthless. It is dead. And all attempts to revive it will be in vain.” (ibid., p. 40)

All Monty Johnstone’s efforts are in vain. Lenin himself completely discarded the slogan of the “democratic dictatorship” in April, 1917. Those who clung to it did so with the intention, not of defending “Leninism” against “Trotskyism”, but in order to cover their own ignominious capitulation to Menshevik reformism. And if, in 1917, Lenin could heap so much scorn upon those who tried to revive the “dead…meaningless…antiquated” formula of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”, what have we to say about Monty Johnstone and the leaders of the so-called Communist Parties, who fifty years later continue to use and abuse the slogan for their own cynical and anti-revolutionary purposes?

The Permanent Revolution in Practice (2)

If the references to the theory of Permanent Revolution in Lenin's works prior to 1917 are scant, the references after that are non-existent. Trotsky's book on the Permanent Revolution was published in Russia and translated into many languages (including English) by the Communist International during Lenin's lifetime, without a word of protest or criticism from Lenin or the mythical "Majority of the Central Committee". However, in the Complete Works of Lenin, published by the Soviet Government after the revolution, there appears a note on Trotsky which contains the following passage:

"Before the Revolution of 1905 he advanced his own unique and now completely celebrated theory of Permanent Revolution, asserting that the bourgeois revolution of 1905 would pass directly to a socialist revolution which would prove the first of a series of national revolutions."

Here without any Johnstone twists and turns the theory of Permanent Revolution is quite accurately described. It was "especially celebrated" after the October Revolution because in it, the events of 1917 had been accurately predicted, in advance.

On pages 14-15 of his article, Monty Johnstone attempts to discredit the theory of permanent revolution by his usual method of "balanced" snippets of quotations:

"Strange to relate, nowhere in any of Lenin's writing and speeches in the period from April 1917 till his death (they take up twenty-three of the fifty-five

volumes of the new Russian edition) has it been possible to find so much as a hint that Lenin was aware of his ‘conversion’ to Trotsky’s view of ‘permanent revolution’ – and Lenin was never afraid of admitting past mistakes. On the other hand, we do find Trotsky on more than one occasion admitting the converse. Thus the 1927 Platform of the Left Opposition … reproduces the declaration of Trotsky and his associates to the Communist International on 15 December, 1926: ‘Trotsky has stated to the International that in those questions of principle upon which he disputed with Lenin, Lenin was right – and particularly upon the question of permanent revolution and the peasantry’. In a letter to the old ‘Left Oppositionist’ Preobrazhensky, who did not accept his theory, Trotsky admitted: ‘Up to February 1917, the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was historically progressive.’ And even in his Lessons of October he wrote that with his formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry Lenin had been attacking the question of an advance towards the Socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasants in a ‘forcible and thoroughly revolutionary way’ – in complete contradiction to his 1909 statement that: ‘the anti-revolutionary features of Bolshevism threaten to become a great danger … in the event of a victory of the revolution’.” (Cogito, p.s 14-15)

Johnstone’s argument concerning the absence of comment in Lenin’s works after 1917 on the question of the permanent revolution condemns itself. Lenin was always scrupulous on matters of theory. He would never have allowed a theoretical question on any important issue to remain unresolved. If he wrote no polemics against the theory of permanent revolution after 1917, if he permitted the publication of Trotsky’s works on this question without comment, and approved a note in the official edition of his Collected Works expressing agreement with this theory, it could only be because, after the issues had been settled by the October Revolution, he was broadly in agreement with Trotsky on this question. It was not a question of Lenin being “converted” by Trotsky, as we have already explained. After 1917, former differences between them on the appraisal of the Russian Revolution (differences which, in any case, were of a secondary nature) ceased to have any but a purely historical significance. As for Trotsky’s alleged “mistakes”, Trotsky was always prepared, not merely to admit his errors, but to explain them (which certainly cannot be said of the Communist Party leaders of today!) We have already shown how Trotsky explained his mistake on the question of the Bolshevik Party. But so far as the theory of

permanent revolution is concerned, Trotsky's only "crime" for which the Stalinists can never forgive him – was that his theory was brilliantly confirmed by events.

In reality, what Monty Johnstone and the other Communist Party "theoreticians" are attacking, under the guise of criticizing the theory of the permanent revolution, is the revolutionary essence and method of Bolshevism itself. In 1924 "Trotskyism" was cynically invented by Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin to serve the interests of their clique struggle against Trotsky. In this they gained the powerful support of the State and Party bureaucracy, which saw in this the end of the turmoil of the Revolution and the beginning of a period of peace and "order" in which they could enjoy the privileges which they were stealthily acquiring. Stalin's espousal of the "theory" of Socialism in One Country was something which Kamenev and Zinoviev, who had been educated in the spirit of Lenin's internationalism, could not stomach. They broke with Stalin – but the damage had already been done. The bureaucracy adhered all the more strongly to the Stalin faction and the "theory" of Socialism in One Country. Their indignant and malicious attacks upon "Trotskyism" and "permanent revolution" were merely the expression of their repudiation of the revolutionary traditions of Bolshevism which conflicted with their material interests.

As to the quotation from the Platform of the Left Opposition – Johnstone knows that this document was not a personal statement of Trotsky's views, but those of the entire Left Opposition – including Kamenev and Zinoviev. While there was agreement on the fundamental questions in the struggle against Stalinism – industrialisation, collectivisation, workers' democracy, internationalism, etc – on other questions Kamenev and Zinoviev still held a different position. The passage on the permanent revolution quoted by Monty Johnstone is one of several which Trotsky opposed, but was out-voted in the Opposition by Kamenev and Zinoviev. For the sake of unity on the fundamental platform against Stalin, Trotsky concurred with this. His own writings provide a consistent defence of the theory, which Kamenev and Zinoviev were unwilling to accept, partly because of the role they had played in October on the question of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".

Concerning the quotation from the letter to Preobrazhensky, the reader will see that there is absolutely no contradiction between the position advanced in this letter and the theory of permanent revolution. Trotsky always considered Lenin's position to be progressive, and close to his own, as against that of the Mensheviks. This is expressed very clearly in the Lessons of October: Monty Johnstone quotes (with his customary "conciseness") from this pamphlet, but he does not explain why it was written, when it was written, or what is in it. The work was written in 1923, after the defeat of the revolutionary movement in Germany, largely due to the bungling of Stalin and Zinoviev.

Trotsky explains in this pamphlet the inevitability of a crisis of leadership in a revolutionary situation because of the enormous pressure of bourgeois "public opinion" even on the most hardened revolutionary leadership. Engels had explained that it sometimes takes decades for a revolutionary situation to build up, and then two or three decades can be summed up in a few days; if the revolutionary leadership fails to take advantage of the situation then it might have to wait another ten, twenty years for a like situation to arise. Recent history is full of such examples, although one would not think so from the work of Monty Johnstone or the lore of the Communist Parties which even discovered and espoused the "Menshevik Road to Socialism".

Trotsky explains the behaviour of the German Communist Party leaders and of the Stalin-Zinoviev leadership as a substitution of Menshevism for Bolshevism, in the manner of February, 1917. And as in 1917, the opportunists justified their position by paying lip service to outmoded theories – including the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". Opportunists are never short of some convenient "theory" or other to excuse their cowardice: thus the Communist Party "theoreticians", to explain away the sell-out in France in May 1968, fell back upon the distortion of Engels' Introduction to the Class Struggles in France, which has been used to discredit revolutionism by the Social Democratic revisionists for eighty years!

In order to throw into sharp relief the imposing features of Comrade Johnstone's fearless "objectivity", let us quote in full what Trotsky says in The Lessons of October about the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry":

"Lenin, even prior to 1905, gave expression to the peculiar character of the Russian revolution in the formula 'the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. This formula, in itself, as future development showed, could acquire meaning only as a stage towards the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry. Lenin's formulation of the problem, revolutionary and dynamic through and through, was completely and irreconcilably counterposed to the Menshevik pattern according to which Russia could pretend only to a repetition of the history of the advanced nations, with the bourgeoisie in power and the social democrats in opposition. Some circles in our party, however, laid stress not on the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in Lenin's formula, but upon its democratic character as opposed to its socialist character. And, again, this could only mean that in Russia, a backward country, only a democratic revolution was conceivable. The socialist revolution was to begin in the West, and we could take to the road of socialism only in the wake of England, France and Germany. But such a formulation of the question slipped inevitably into Menshevism, and this was fully revealed in 1917 when the tasks of the revolution were posed before us, not for prognosis but for decisive action.

"To hold, under the actual conditions of revolution, a position of supporting democracy pushed to its logical conclusion of opposition to socialism as 'being premature', meant, in politics, a shift from the proletarian to a petty bourgeois position. It meant going over to the position of the left wing of national revolution." (The Essential Trotsky, p. 122)

What happened in Russia in 1917? According to Monty Johnstone the February Revolution marked the completion of the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution. The October Revolution marked the socialist stage. But, on the one hand, the February Revolution did not solve any one of the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic phase. On the other hand the socialist revolution initially

began with the bourgeois-democratic measures, notably the agrarian revolution. Monty Johnstone masks his own confusion (and deepens that of his readers!) by desperately seizing on isolated quotes from Lenin – arbitrarily and quite incorrectly juxtaposing bleeding chunks from Lenin's writings of 1905 with his polemics against the "Old Bolsheviks" in 1917! We would ask Comrade Johnstone: how can a bourgeois-democratic revolution be completed, when it has not dealt with the most fundamental questions before it?

How could the Bolsheviks mobilise support for the socialist revolution on the basis of bourgeois democratic slogans: ("Peace, Bread, Land")?

In an apogee of exasperation, Monty Johnstone blurts out:

"It required the October Revolution, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, to carry out those bourgeois democratic tasks which had not been tackled or completed between February and October." (Cogito, p. 12)

Indeed it did, Comrade Johnstone! But that is precisely the nefarious theory of Permanent Revolution. In the October Revolution, the proletariat, in alliance with the poor peasants, first solved the basic problems of the bourgeois democratic revolution, then went on, uninterruptedly, to carry out socialist measures. Therein lies the "permanent", uninterrupted nature of the Russian Revolution.

We might also ask Monty Johnstone which tasks had been "tackled or completed between February and October"? Not the distribution of land to the peasants. Not the establishment of a democratic peace. Not even the setting up of a genuine democratic system of government! The abolition of the monarchy? But even that was in abeyance: the original intention of the heroes of Russian "democracy" was to create a constitutional monarchy.

The bourgeois democratic “allies” of the working class, before whose “achievements” Monty Johnstone stands in religious awe were repeatedly flayed by Lenin, who openly mocked at their impotence:

“Those poltroons, gas-bags, vainglorious Narcissuses and petty Hamlets brandished their wooden swords – but did not even destroy the monarchy! We cleansed out all that monarchist muck as nobody has ever done before. We left not a stone, not a brick of that ancient edifice, the social-estate system (even the most advanced countries, such as Britain, France, and Germany, have not completely eliminated the survivals of that system to this day!), standing. We tore out the deep-seated roots of the social-estate system, namely, the remnants of feudalism and serfdom in the system of land ownership, to the last. ‘One may argue’ (there are plenty of quill-drivers, Cadets, Mensheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries abroad to indulge in such arguments) as to what ‘in the long run’ will be the outcome of the agrarian reform effected by the Great October Revolution. We have no desire at the moment to waste time on such controversies, for we are deciding this, as well as the mass of accompanying controversies, by struggle. But the fact cannot be denied that the petty-bourgeois democrats ‘compromised’ with the landowners, the custodians of the traditions of serfdom, for eight months, while we completely swept the landowners and all their traditions from Russian soil in a few weeks.” (Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 33, p.s 52-3)

The democratic rights which the workers won in 1917 were the results of their own struggles, not the “gifts” of the “petty Hamlets” of bourgeois parliamentarianism! As a matter of fact, under the cover of the “democracy” of the Provisional Government (exactly like the later Popular Front Governments in France and Spain) the reaction was preparing a bloody rebuff to the movement of the masses who had gone “too far”. The attempted counter-revolutionary coup of Kornilov in August-September 1917, with the support and encouragement of the bourgeoisie, signalised the bankruptcy of the whole rotten system of bourgeois democracy in Russia. In order to decisively defeat the forces of reaction and carry out the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution, it was

necessary for the workers and peasants to snatch the reins of power from the trembling hands of the treacherous and vacillating “democrats”. That is a lesson which the “Communist” leaders of today still stubbornly refuse to learn; their “popular frontism” in Greece, in Spain, in France and elsewhere will pave the way for new and sanguinary defeats of the working class unless a decisive break is made with the rotten policies of Menshevik class collaborationism.

In the February Revolution, Tsarism had been overthrown precisely by the movement of the workers in the towns, who were then joined by the peasants in uniform. As for the bourgeoisie and its parties of “liberal democracy” – it played no role whatsoever. Real power was in the hands of the workers’ and soldiers’ Soviets. The Provisional Government hung in mid-air, deprived of any solid basis of support, other than that which the cowardly readerships of the Mensheviks and SRs were prepared to “voluntarily surrender” to it! What was necessary, as Lenin and Trotsky clearly understood, was for the workers and peasants to organise to convert this “dual power” (an abortion which resulted from the sell-out of the Mensheviks and SRs) into real workers’ power.

Marx and Engels had explained the cowardly, counter-revolutionary role of the German bourgeoisie in 1848 in terms of its fear of the working class movement which stood menacingly behind it in its struggle against feudalism and autocracy. The Russian bourgeoisie, sixty years later, was even more incapable of imitating the heroism of its class brothers of 1789. In the History of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky explains that the belatedness of capitalist development in Russia ruled out the possibility of the Russian bourgeoisie playing a revolutionary role. On the one hand, taking advantage of the techniques learned from Western capitalism, Russian industry bore a highly concentrated character with a large number of workers thrust together in large numbers, under bad conditions, in the few towns, haunting the bourgeoisie with the spectre of a new Paris Commune in the event of a mass revolutionary upheaval.

On the other hand, the Russian bourgeoisie was heavily dependent for

investment and credit on the purse strings of international capital:

“The social character of the Russian bourgeoisie and its political physiognomy were determined by the condition of origin and the structure of Russian industry. The extreme concentration of this industry alone meant that between the capitalist leaders and the popular masses there was no hierarchy of transitional layers. To this we must add that the proprietors of the principal industrial, banking and transport enterprises were foreigners, who realised on their investment not only the profits drawn from Russia, but also a political influence in foreign parliaments, and so not only did not forward the struggle for Russian parliamentarianism, but often opposed it: it is sufficient to recall the shameful role played by official France. Such are the elementary and irremovable causes of the political isolation and anti-popular character of the Russian bourgeoisie. Whereas in the dawn of its history it was too unripe to accomplish a Reformation, when the time came for leading a revolution it was overripe.” (Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution, vol. 1, p. 32)

And these features are not something peculiar to the Russian bourgeoisie: with minor differences, they are an accurate characterisation of the “national” bourgeoisies of every backward, semi colonial country. Lenin poured scorn on the Mensheviks for their class collaborationism – their “Popular Frontism” (for that is what it was, though the Mensheviks did not use the word) – their attempts to ingratiate themselves with the parties of so-called “liberal, bourgeois democracy”, under the pretext that the bourgeoisie was a “progressive” force in the struggle against autocracy. And what would he say if he could witness the even more blatant class collaborationism of the Communist Party everywhere in the world today: in Greece, in Spain, in Indonesia, in India? Nowhere has the “democratic” bourgeoisie played anything other than the most corrupt and counter-revolutionary role. Yet nowhere do the Communist Party leaderships pursue an independent, Leninist, class policy vis-à-vis the politicians of bourgeois democracy.

The Stalinist “theory” of “stages”, which has been incanted monotonously by the

Communist Party “theoreticians”, including Monty Johnstone, is a crude and mechanical caricature of the ideas of Lenin. What has Monty Johnstone to say about the German revolution of 1918 or the Italian stay-in strikes of 1920? In the former case, the German workers seized power in a bloodless revolution, only to be sold out by their Social Democratic “leaders”, who, hiding behind the “bourgeois-democratic” nature of the revolution, “voluntarily surrendered” (!) power to the bourgeoisie! Was this, as the Social Democratic leaders claimed, the “democratic stage” of the German revolution, Comrade Johnstone? If so, why did Lenin denounce the Social Democratic leaders for betraying the socialist revolution?

A similar process took place in Italy in 1920, where the massive wave of sit-in strikes created a revolutionary situation: the failure of the socialist leaders to pose clearly the revolutionary way forward led to the defeat of the Italian workers and directly to the rise of Mussolini. Like the German Social Democratic leadership, they excused themselves on the grounds that the masses were “not ready” for socialist revolution. But if Lenin could bitterly attack the Italian Socialist leaders for failing to advance the revolutionary programme then, what would he have to say about the French Communist Party “leadership” in the general strike of May 1968, which was infinitely deeper and broader than the movement in Italy in 1920?

Opportunists of every stripe have always placed the responsibility for defeats at the door of the masses who are allegedly “unready” for socialism. But the history of the last fifty years shows time and time again the willingness of the working class to struggle and make heroic sacrifices to achieve a social transformation. “Why always blame the leaders?” ask the Communist Party “theoreticians” of 1968, echoing the indignant words of the Kautskys, Scheidemanns and Serratis in 1918-20. Having lost all faith in the ability of the working people to change society, the haughty bureaucrat is unable to conceive of any connection between his parliamentary cretinism and the failure of the masses, without a conscious revolutionary lead, to carry through their movement to a victorious conclusion.

What lessons have the Communist Party leaders drawn from all this? Monty Johnstone uses quotations from some of the polemics of Lenin. But he does not choose to quote from Lenin's numerous polemics against the Mensheviks, who tried to tie the Russian proletariat to the "progressive", "liberal" bourgeoisie. Why does he not quote Lenin's innumerable attacks upon class collaborationism, his insistence upon the revolutionary workers and peasants as the only classes capable of carrying through the democratic revolution?

Apparently, in all of Lenin's writings, Monty Johnstone sees only one long denunciation of the heresy of Permanent Revolution. He sees nothing relevant to the crass, Menshevik policies of Stalin in China in 1925-27. He sees nothing connected with the Cuban Communist Party which supported Batista as a "progressive anti-American force" in the thirties, and which denounced Castro as a "petit-bourgeois adventurer", of the Iraqi Communist Party which hailed Kassim, as the Great Deliverer, till he began to shoot them down, and drive them underground! The Soviet comrades pursue a good neighbourly policy vis-à-vis the "progressive" Shah of Persia, which involves handing over political refugees to the firing squad. The Indonesian comrades, with their "Leninist" policy of a bloc of "workers, peasants, intelligentsia, national bourgeoisie, progressive aristocrats and all patriotic elements" grovelled before the "progressive" dictator Sukarno as a result of which half a million Communists were murdered without resistance. China and Russia vied with each other in praise of that "valiant anti-imperialist fighter" Ayub Khan, till he was overthrown by the Pakistani workers and peasants.

These are just a few samples of the "Leninist" orientation of the "Communist" Party leaderships today. Under the pretext of loyalty to the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", they are everywhere pursuing a policy of class collaboration which is just what Trotsky called it, a "malicious caricature of Menshevism".

Many comrades in the Communist Party and Young Communist League will have been confused by Monty Johnstone's mental gymnastics on the Permanent

Revolution. We hope that some of the points have been clarified here. The theory of the Permanent Revolution is not the complicated, arid theoretical question which Johnstone makes it out to be, but one which sums up the whole experience of the revolutionary movement in Russia of the October Revolution. Without a clear understanding of these questions, no Marxist will be able to find his bearings in the present world situation. The tragedies of Indonesia, of Greece, of Pakistan, will be repeated. It is up to all serious socialists to study the lessons of these events to prepare themselves theoretically for the future role they must play in Britain and internationally.

5. Trotsky and Brest-Litovsk

“Although Trotsky had supported Lenin against the opposition of Kamenev and Zinoviev on the need to organise an insurrection in October 1917 he was to find himself at loggerheads with him at the beginning of 1918 on the signing of a peace treaty with Germany. The way he acted on this question highlights both his strength and his weaknesses.” (Cogito, p. 17)

This is the first and last reference in Johnstone’s article of Lenin’s struggle against the “Old Bolsheviks” in 1917. That it comes in a subordinate clause is an indication of the place it occupies in Monty Johnstone’s scheme of things. Of course, Trotsky “just happened” to have the same position as Lenin on the little question of the October revolution, in the face of opposition from Kamenev, Stalin and Zinoviev, but on other “fundamental questions”, he again found himself in opposition to “the correct line”.

Monty Johnstone here attempts the same trick which he used in the section on the “Permanent Revolution”. In that section, by “forgetting” about the position of the Mensheviks, he exaggerates out of all proportion the differences between Lenin and Trotsky. On Brest-Litovsk, again Johnstone knows of only two positions: Lenin’s (i.e. for immediately accepting the German terms) and Trotsky’s (which he characterises as “neither peace nor war”). But Monty Johnstone knows perfectly well that on this question, there were not two positions, but three: the positions of Lenin and Trotsky and that of Bukharin, who stood not only for a rejection of the German terms, but for a revolutionary war against Germany. He also forgets to mention the little point that Bukharin’s position was originally that of the majority of the Party at the time of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations.

What was the attitude of the Bolsheviks towards the war? In 1915, considering

the possibility of the Bolsheviks coming to power in Russia, Lenin wrote an article in his journal Sotsial-Democrat under the heading Some Theses:

“To the question what the party of the proletariat would do if the revolution put it in power in the present war, we reply: we should propose peace to all the belligerents on condition of the liberation of the colonies, and of all dependent and oppressed peoples not enjoying full rights. Neither Germany nor England nor France would under their present governments accept this condition. Then we should have to prepare to wage a revolutionary war, i.e. we should not only carry out in full by the most decisive measures our minimum programme, but should systematically incite to insurrection all the peoples now oppressed by the Great Russians, all colonies and dependent countries of Asia (India, China, Persia, etc) and also – and first of all – incite the proletariat of Europe to insurrection against its governments and in defiance of its social chauvinists.” (Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 403)

Such was the bold, revolutionary strategy worked out by Lenin in advance for the Russian Revolution. It has nothing in common with the mealy-mouthed pacifism which the Communist Party parsons preach today, and which they try to foist upon the leader of October. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, before 1917, stood for revolutionary war: a war directed by the Revolution against imperialism, which would combine the armed struggle of the Red Army with the insurrection of the workers of Europe and the peoples of the oppressed nations.

In the period of agitation and preparation prior to October, the Bolsheviks repeatedly emphasised that they stood for a “peace without annexations or indemnities”, that they would offer such a peace to the imperialists, and, in the event of their refusing, the Bolsheviks would launch a revolutionary war against them. Thus, Lenin wrote late in September, 1917:

“If the least probable should occur, i.e. if no belligerent state accepts even an armistice, then the war on our side would become a really necessary, really just

and defensive war. The mere fact that the proletariat and the poorest peasantry will be conscious of this will make Russia many times stronger in the military respect, especially after a complete break with the capitalists who rob the people, not to mention that then the war on our side will be, not in words, but in fact, a war in alliance with the oppressed peoples of the whole world." (Collected Works, vol. 26, p. 63)

The idea of revolutionary war was accepted without question as part of the basic strategy of the Party. Thus, when Kamenev and Zinoviev wrote their open letter opposing the October Revolution, one of their key arguments was the prospect of a revolutionary war, with which they attempted to frighten the workers:

"The masses of soldiers support us because we advance not a slogan of war, but a slogan of peace … If we seize power alone now and if we find ourselves compelled by the entire world situation to engage in a revolutionary war, the soldier masses will recoil from us."

This was a good argument for signing the Brest-Litovsk peace, months in advance. But it was proof, not of the historical foresight of Kamenev and Zinoviev, but only of their shaky nerves and opportunist waverings. Their later support for the signing of the Treaty was merely the obverse side of their opposition to the October insurrection: the two cannot be separated. For a Marxist, not only what is said, but who says it and for what reasons, are the important questions.

What was the attitude of the Bolsheviks towards the treaty of Brest-Litovsk? The army which they inherited from Tsarism had completely disintegrated; whole units had demobilised themselves; discipline had broken down; the officers had gone over to reaction. It was this concrete situation, and not any fundamental theoretical considerations which determined the actions of the Bolsheviks. To portray the disagreements in the Party as anything more than tactical differences is a complete travesty of the truth. Under different circumstances – if, for

example, they had had time to build the Red Army – the question would have been posed in an entirely different way, as was demonstrated by the Polish war of 1920.

The first policy pursued by the Bolsheviks was to prolong the negotiations as long as possible, in the hope that a revolutionary movement in the West would come to the assistance of the revolution. This idea, which “realist” philistines today characterise as “Trotskyism” was expressed on dozens of occasions not only by Trotsky but also by all of the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin. Kamenev, for example, who later supported Lenin’s stand on the signing of the peace, said of the propaganda conducted at Brest-Litovsk that “our words will reach the German people over the heads of the German generals, that our words will strike from the hands of the German generals the weapon with which they fool the people”. Events worked out differently to what Kamenev anticipated, but at the time he spoke for the entire Bolshevik Party.

The main credit for conducting the successful propaganda at Brest-Litovsk was Trotsky’s. He turned the conference into a platform for expounding the ideas of the revolution to the war-weary workers of Europe. Trotsky’s speeches were later collected together and published in several editions and in many languages by the Communist International during Lenin’s lifetime. Only after 1924 did the Stalinists suddenly discover in them the “revolutionary phrase”, which warranted their suppression.

The delay of the revolution in the West, and the military weakness of the Russian Revolution, caused a difference of opinion in the Party leadership, a difference in which Lenin found himself in a minority. The first time the differences were expressed was on January 21, 1918 – when the negotiations were nearing a climax. Fearing a new offensive if the Bolsheviks rejected a German ultimatum, Lenin proposed an immediate signing of the peace, even on the disastrous terms offered by the Germans. Trotsky agreed that there was no possibility of continuing the war, but thought that negotiations should be broken off and the Bolsheviks should only capitulate in the event of a new advance. Bukharin

demanded the waging of a revolutionary war.

Far from the false picture presented by the Stalinists from 1924 onwards of Lenin and the Bolsheviks being defied by an undisciplined and ultra-left Trotsky, both Lenin and Trotsky constituted the “moderate” minority in the leadership on this question. And what was true of the leadership was doubly true of the rank and file. The overwhelming majority of workers opposed the signing of the treaty. When the leadership invited the Soviets to give their views on Brest-Litovsk, over two hundred responded: of these, only two large Soviets (Petrograd and Sevastopol – the latter with reservations) supported peace. All the other big workers’ centres, Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Kharkov, Ekaterinoslav, Ivanovo-Vozuesensk, Kronstadt, etc., voted by overwhelming majorities to break off the negotiations.

At the Central Committee meeting on January 24, 1918 the final decision was taken on the line which Trotsky should adopt at Brest-Litovsk. Before the meeting, Trotsky records a conversation with Lenin in which he agreed to Trotsky’s plan to refuse to sign the treaty but to declare hostilities at an end, on condition that should the Germans advance again, Trotsky would support the immediate signing of the treaty and on no account support the proposal for a “revolutionary war”. To this Trotsky agreed.[1] Here Lenin did not put forward his demand for the immediate signing of the treaty, but merely moved a motion which was passed, calling on Trotsky to drag out the negotiations as long as possible. A vote was then taken on Trotsky’s motion to stop the war but refuse to sign the treaty, which was also passed.

According to Monty Johnstone, “when faced with the harsh terms demanded by the Germans, overestimation of the immediate revolutionary perspectives overshadowed his [Trotsky’s] appreciation of the reality of the situation and led him to refuse to sign the treaty.” (Cogito, p. 17)

We have already seen what “led Trotsky to refuse to sign the treaty”, in the

above account of the disagreements in the Party. Monty Johnstone, here as elsewhere, confines his “analysis” to a few snippets of quotations which do not deal with any of the fundamental issues, but only the polemical rejoinders of the participants, and which create the impression that Trotsky’s position was his personal whim and not the view of the Party. Johnstone continues:

“Lenin, on the other hand, stressed that the Germans had the whip hand and that the war-weary, ill-equipped and hungry Russian troops could not hold out against their powerful military machine.[!] He therefore [!] urged accepting the German terms, humiliating as he considered them to be, as soon as the Germans presented an ultimatum, warning that the alternative would be that the Germans would advance further into Soviet territory and impose even worse terms.” (Cogito, p. 17)

Monty Johnstone portrays the whole affair as an antagonism between Trotsky and Lenin. He is determined to purvey the image of Lenin as a smug “realist” philistine, opposing the revolutionary “dreams” of Trotsky. He quotes isolated phrases from Lenin about world revolution being “a good fairy tale”, without explaining the reasons which Lenin gave for his stand on Brest-Litovsk, reasons which flowed from an intransigent revolutionary socialist internationalism.

In the course of the discussion Lenin found himself “supported” by Zinoviev and Stalin. Stalin stated that “there is no revolutionary movement in the West, no facts of it, only a possibility.” Zinoviev declared that although “by making peace we shall strengthen chauvinism in Germany and for a certain time weaken the movement in the West” this was far better than “the ruin of the socialist republic”. Lenin was obliged publicly to repudiate support based on the arguments of these “realists”, whose philistinism Monty Johnstone now attempts to foist on him.

In reply to Zinoviev, Lenin stated categorically that if “the German movement is capable of developing at once in the event of peace negotiations … we ought to

sacrifice ourselves since the German revolution will be far more powerful than ours." Precisely to protect his rear against this kind of opportunism, Lenin repeatedly emphasised that:

"It is not open to the slightest doubt that the final victory of our revolution if it were to remain alone, if there were no revolutionary movements in other countries, would be hopeless … Our salvation from all these difficulties, I repeat, is an all-European revolution." (Ibid. p. 212)

After 1924, the legend was invented of Trotsky stubbornly opposing Lenin and the leadership by refusing to sign the peace for which everyone yearned. On February 14, after Trotsky had reported back to the Soviet Central Executive Committee on the action he had taken, Sverdlov moved a resolution, on behalf of the Bolshevik faction that: "Having heard and fully considered the report of the peace delegation, the Central Executive Committee fully approves of the action of its representatives at Brest-Litovsk." As late as March 1918, Zinoviev said at the Party Congress that "Trotsky is right when he says that he acted in accordance with the decision of the majority of the Central Committee." No one tried to deny that.

Trotsky, no more than Lenin, was under any illusion that the "war-weary, ill-equipped and hungry Russian troops" could sustain a new attack, let alone launch a revolutionary war. But, on the one hand, the mood both of the mass of workers and the majority of the Party leadership was set against accepting the terms of the treaty which were not merely "humiliating", but a major disaster for the young Soviet state. On the other hand, a new German offensive would convince the masses of Western Europe that the Bolsheviks only agreed to an annexationist peace under compulsion. This was an important political motive, in view of the vicious smear campaign being waged by the "Allied Governments" (Britain and France), that the Bolsheviks were German agents, paid by the Kaiser to take Russia out of the war. There was a strong feeling in Russia that this was the prelude to negotiations with Germany for a peace settlement at Russia's expense. (History has since proved that such a policy was

being considered by British and French government circles.)

After the renewal of the German ultimatum, Lenin again argued for an immediate signing of the peace, but was defeated, by a narrow majority in the Central Committee. Trotsky still voted against, since the offensive had not begun. Lenin then reformulated the question as follows: “If the German offensive begins, and no revolutionary upheaval takes place in Germany, are we still not to sign peace?” On this the “left” Communists (Bukharin and the supporters of revolutionary war) abstained. Trotsky voted for the motion, which was in line with the agreement he had reached earlier with Lenin. When, on the next day, the Bolsheviks received evidence of the German advance, Trotsky switched over to Lenin’s side, giving him a majority on the Central Committee.

On February 21, new and harsher terms were announced by General Hoffmann, with the clear intention of making impossible the signing of a peace. The German general staff staged a provocation in Finland, where they crushed the Finnish workers’ movement. This underlined the fears of the Bolsheviks that the Allies had come to an agreement with German imperialism to crush the Soviet Republic. There was a serious possibility that, even if the Bolsheviks signed the treaty, the Germans would continue their advance. Trotsky initially held this view, but when Lenin reiterated his position, in the teeth of renewed opposition from the “Lefts”, Trotsky did not side with the advocates of revolutionary war, but abstained, to give Lenin a majority.

It seems strange that one so infatuated with the “revolutionary phrase” should on two decisive occasions have voted on the Central Committee, to give Lenin a majority! But since we are on the subject of “the revolutionary phrase” let us take a look at Lenin’s pamphlet of that name, from which Johnstone quotes so copiously.

‘The Revolutionary Phrase’ was published by Lenin as an article in Pravda on February 21, 1918, as the beginning of a public campaign in favour of signing

the peace. Johnstone cites this article several times as though it were directed against Trotsky. In fact, Trotsky's name does not appear once in this article. Whom is it directed against? The answer is in the very first line:

"When I said at a Party meeting that the revolutionary phrase about a revolutionary war might ruin our revolution, I was reproached for the sharpness of my polemics." (Works, vol. 27, p. 19, our emphasis)

Anyone who reads the article can see quite plainly that it is directed against those who advocated a revolutionary war against Germany, despite the military weakness of the Soviet Republic: i.e. the "left" Communist group of Bukharin. That is why in all the polemics, Lenin directs 99% of his attacks against Bukharin's group, and Trotsky, if he is mentioned at all, is taken up only in passing and in a relatively mild manner. The distortion appears all the more crass and clumsy when we recall that Lenin's article was published on February 21, three days after Trotsky had voted for Lenin's proposal on the Central Committee. It is sheer dishonesty on Johnstone's part to print words which Lenin directed against the ultra-left Bukharin in such a way as to suggest that they were meant for Trotsky. This distortion is made possible by the fact that Johnstone does not mention Bukharin at all, thereby creating an entirely exaggerated, false and dishonest impression of the differences between Lenin and Trotsky.

E. H. Carr, the celebrated bourgeois historian, whom Monty Johnstone can hardly accuse of being either a Trotskyist or "unhistorical", comments on the differences between Lenin and Trotsky on Brest-Litovsk thus:

"Lenin's disagreements with Trotsky over Brest-Litovsk were less profound than those which separated him from the followers of Bukharin. Trotsky's strong personality and his dramatic role in the Brest-Litovsk story gave them a greater practical importance and a greater prominence in the eyes both of contemporaries and of posterity. But the popular picture of Trotsky, the advocate of world revolution, clashing with Lenin, the champion of national security or

socialism in one country, is so distorted as to be almost entirely false." (The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 3, p. 54, our emphasis)

To judge from Monty Johnstone's "highly selective, potted history" the entire history of Bolshevism and the Soviet Power (with a few brief exceptions, such as the "episode" of the October Revolution to which Comrade Johnstone kindly devotes one paragraph) consisted of struggles between Lenin and Trotsky! Such is the admirable "balance", "objective", work, which Comrade Johnstone promised us in his Introduction.

It will not be amiss to illustrate the utter one-sidedness of Johnstone's "objectivity" by citing two other incidents concerning the relationship of the Soviet Republic to the capitalist world and the position of Lenin and Trotsky. Immediately after the Brest-Litovsk controversy, Trotsky found himself at loggerheads with an important section of the leadership on the question of accepting aid from Britain and France. The motion of acceptance was moved by Trotsky, and opposed by Bukharin and the "lefts", together with Sverdlov. Lenin was not present at the meeting, but the minutes contain a note from him which runs as follows: "I request you to add my vote in favour of taking potatoes and ammunition from the Anglo-French imperialist robbers."

Two years after Brest-Litovsk, a similar split in the leadership took place over the war with Poland. Trotsky opposed any attempt to carry the war into Poland once Pilsudski's attack had been repulsed, on military and political grounds. Lenin favoured an offensive, on the grounds that the workers of Warsaw and other cities would be encouraged by a revolutionary war to rise against Pilsudski and carry out a revolution. The Red Army, after a brilliant advance, was defeated at the gates of Warsaw, and driven back across the Curzon line to a position behind the line they had occupied at the commencement of hostilities. In the treaty which followed, the Bolsheviks were forced to cede a large area of Byelorussia to Poland, which separated Germany and Lithuania from the Soviet Republic.

Was Lenin in 1920 infatuated by the “revolutionary phrase”? Was he guilty of indulging in the “fairy tale” of world revolution and “wishful thinking”? Only a philistine would dare to say so. Lenin was a revolutionary and an internationalist. His actions were dictated, first and foremost, by the interests of the world proletarian revolution.

Lenin had not advocated peace at Brest-Litovsk as anything more than a breathing space, in which to rebuild the shattered armies of Russia, to create a Red Army for defence and offence, as a means of assisting the revolution in the West: in the very same breath that he argued for the signing of peace, Lenin added that it was “indispensable to prepare for revolutionary war”.

Lenin’s own characterisation of his stand over Brest-Litovsk is a sufficient antidote to the poison of pacifism, “peaceful coexistence”, and social patriotism which the Stalinists have tried to read into it:

“At the Brest-Litovsk peace we had to go in the face of patriotism. We said: if you are a socialist, you must sacrifice your patriotic feelings in the name of the international revolution, which is coming, which has not yet come, but in which you must believe if you are an internationalist.” (Works, vol. 28, November/December 1918)

Lenin was the supreme political realist. He always based his actions on a meticulous examination of all the elements which made up the international balance of class forces. But there is no guarantee of success in revolution. To imagine this is to join the ranks of those “objective” philistines, whose peculiar talent is always to be right – after the event. However, the reasons why Lenin was in favour of signing the Brest-Litovsk Peace have nothing in common with those advanced by Johnstone and the Communist Party leaders which are intended, not to shed light upon Lenin’s position on Brest-Litovsk, but as a cover-up for their own pusillanimous and anti-Leninist policies of today.

Notes

[1] The accuracy of this report is attested to by Lenin, who repeated it later in a speech at the Eleventh Party Congress. (Works, vol. 27, p. 113)

6. The Rise of Stalinism

Monty Johnstone does not waste his reader's time by introducing into his "balanced estimate" of Trotsky's career any details of the key role which he admits Trotsky played in the Civil War, to which he devotes one paragraph. Perhaps it would have prejudiced the reader's sense of objectivity to discover, for instance, that Lenin provided Trotsky during the Civil War with blank sheets of paper to which Lenin's signature was appended, authorising any action which the "revolutionary phrasemonger" saw fit to take!

Glossing over the little episode of the Civil War, Johnstone refers us to his old friend Isaac Deutscher, in whose Prophet Armed the story is "stirringly told" of "both Trotsky's mistakes (sometimes serious) and of his achievements (which much out-weighed them)" And that is clearly the reason why Monty Johnstone is not over-anxious to dwell on the Civil War. Having spent the first half of his work trying to paint a picture of Trotsky as a petty-bourgeois individualist, devoid of organisational abilities, he goes on, without the least hint of embarrassment, to quote the words of Gorky:

"Show me another man", he (Lenin) said, thumping the table "capable of organising in a year an almost exemplary army and moreover of winning the esteem of the military specialists." (Cogito, p. 17)

Fearing lest the "balance" of this estimate should be upset by all this, Monty Johnstone hastens to add another quotation from Gorky where Lenin is supposed to have said of Trotsky:

"He isn't one of us. With us, but not of us. He is ambitious. There is something

of Lassalle in him, something which isn't good."(Cogito, p. 17)

Monty Johnstone's scrupulous use of quotations has already been commented on. This is another good example. The second quotation does not occur anywhere in the original edition of Gorky's Reminiscences of Lenin, written in 1924. At that early date it would not have been possible to insert so blatant a falsehood. But Gorky was obliged to rewrite his memoirs in 1930. On Stalin's orders, parts of Gorky's memory faded, while other "memories" made their first appearance: among them, the particular piece of falsification quoted by Monty Johnstone. And since Comrade Johnstone is interested in Gorky's report of Lenin's attitude to Trotsky, let us throw in another piece from the genuine, original memoirs where Lenin attacks the slanderers who attempted to drive a wedge between him and Trotsky: "Yes, yes, I know they lie a lot about my relations with him."

The Trade Union Controversy

“In the first big Party discussion after the Revolution involving the problem of bureaucracy, Trotsky clashed head on with the majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee. Lenin strongly criticised his policy of bureaucratically nagging the Trade Unions as expressing ‘the worst in military experience’ and containing ‘a number of errors that are connected with the very essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat’.” (Cogito, p. 19)

Once again, the reader should note Monty Johnstone’s method of “analysis”, which consists purely and simply of taking isolated snippets of quotations, torn from their contexts, with no indication of the background, of the arguments themselves, or even of the dates! Marxists, beginning with Marx, have always insisted upon such small things as dates, accurate and full quotations, theoretical analysis, and the rest. Only by a scrupulously honest approach can historical questions be explained.

The trade union dispute was one episode in the whole crisis of the political and economic mode of organisation known as War Communism, and cannot be understood apart from this question. Lenin described War Communism as “communism in a besieged fortress”. This system, based upon strict centralisation and the introduction of quasi-military measures into all fields of life, flowed from the difficulties of the revolution isolated in a backward, war-shattered country, under conditions of civil war and foreign intervention. Yet Monty Johnstone poses the question as if Trotsky alone held the position of “militarisation of labour”. The first years of Soviet power were characterised by acute economic difficulties, partly the result of war and civil war, partly as a result of the shortage of both materials and skilled manpower, and partly of the opposition of the peasant small property owners to the socialist measures of the Bolsheviks.

In 1920, the production of iron ore and cast iron fell to 1.6% and 2.4% of their 1913 levels. The best record was for oil, which stood at 41% of its 1913 level. Coal attained 17%. The general production of fully manufactured goods in 1920 stood at 12.9% of their 1913 value. Agricultural production dropped in two years (1917-19) by 16%, the heaviest losses being sustained by those products exported from the villages to the town: hemp fell by 26%, flax by 32%, fodder by 40%. The conditions of civil war, together with the chronic inflation of the period, brought trade between town and countryside to a virtual standstill.

The ghastly conditions of the workers in the towns led to a mass exodus from industry to the land. By 1919 the number of industrial workers declined to 76% of the 1917 level, while that of building workers fell to 66%, railway workers to 63%. By 1920, the figure for industrial workers generally fell from three millions in 1917 to 1,240,000 – i.e. to less than half. In two years the working class population of Petrograd was halved. Even these figures do not convey the full extent of the catastrophe since they leave out of account the decline in labour productivity of those ragged half-starved workers who remained in the factories.

Even more serious than the economic consequences, from the Bolshevik point of view, was the rapid erosion of the class basis of the Revolution which Rudzutak graphically described at the second all-Russian Congress of trade unions in January 1919:

“We observe in a large number of industrial centres that the workers, thanks to the contraction of production in the factories, are being absorbed in the peasant mass, and instead of a population of workers we are getting a half peasant or sometimes purely peasant population.”

In order to put a stop to this catastrophic decline, drastic measures were introduced to get industry moving, to feed the hungry workers and to end the

drift from town to country. That was the essential meaning of “War Communism”. The Seventh Party Congress in March 1918 called for “the most energetic, unsparingly decisive, draconian measures to raise the self-discipline and discipline of the workers and peasants.” To the complaints of the Mensheviks, Lenin replied that:

“We should be ridiculous utopians if we imagined that such a task could be carried out on the day after the fall of the bourgeoisie, i.e. in the first stage of transition from capitalism to socialism, or without compulsion.”

The arguments of the Mensheviks and the “lefts” based upon a caricature of bourgeois arguments about the “freedom of labour” reflected the growing mood of disenchantment with the dictatorship of the proletariat among the backward and petty-bourgeois strata, especially the peasantry who bore the brunt of the policy of War Communism.

Lenin had seen as early as 1905, that the peasantry would support the Revolution insofar as it gave them land, but that the rich strata would inevitably pass over to the opposition as soon as the revolution began to attack the foundations of private property. A dangerous situation would be created if the revolution remained isolated. The proletariat was a tiny minority in a sea of peasant small-property owners. Without a steady supply of raw materials and food from the villages, industry would grind to a halt. But, given the shattered condition of industry, there was no possibility of immediately establishing conditions of healthy exchange between town and country, of providing the peasantry with the manufactured goods it demanded in exchange for its products. At the Ninth Party Congress Lenin put the matter in a nutshell:

“If we could tomorrow give 100,000 first-class tractors, supply them with benzene, supply them mechanics (you know well that for the present this is a fantasy), the middle peasant would say: ‘I am for Communism’. But in order to do this, it is first necessary to conquer the international bourgeoisie, to compel it

to give us these tractors."

Lenin explained time and again that the only real solution to the problems facing the revolution was the victory of the socialist revolution in one or more of the advanced countries. In the meantime, the economic crisis had to be tackled by drastic measures. Even after the Civil War, Lenin made a speech at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets in 1920 where he explained that "In a country of small peasants, it is our chief and fundamental task to discover how to achieve state compulsion in order to raise peasant production." (our emphasis)

To arrest the flow of workers from town to country, draconian measures were introduced against "labour desertions". In 1920, a worker at the Kolomesky works told the visiting British Labour delegation that "desertions from the works were frequent and that deserters were arrested by soldiers and brought back from the villages." An official decree, passed after the Ninth Party Congress (March 1920) prescribed severe punishment for "labour desertion" up to and including hard labour. Labour was put on a military footing. "War Communism" meant the "militarisation of labour", for a temporary period.

Those who lump together Lenin and Trotsky with the regime of Stalin and his heirs, by using the arguments of Kautsky and the Mensheviks about the "regime of coercion", ignore the differences of time, place, methods and conditions. Even in the most democratic of bourgeois states, such as Britain, under wartime conditions measures were taken prohibiting the free movement of labour, changing of jobs, etc. as "exceptional" measures. The Bolsheviks were faced with Civil War, following hard upon four years of a disastrous imperialist war. The country was ruined by the depredations of the White Guards and the armies of intervention. Under such conditions drastic measures were absolutely necessary. But as always with Lenin and Trotsky freedom of discussion and criticism by the workers and peasants, especially within the Bolshevik Party itself, was safeguarded. Even in capitalist Britain, during the War, the workers were prepared to accept "exceptional" measures, which they thought were necessary for the defence of their rights. In Russia, with a workers' and peasants'

government, the workers were prepared to accept temporarily the harsh measures which were necessary to preserve the Revolution.

Trotsky – an “Arch-bureaucrat”?

Monty Johnstone is uncomfortably aware of the fact that, after Lenin’s death, the struggle against bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinism was led by Trotsky and the Left Opposition. He is therefore at pains to make out a “case” that Trotsky himself was an “arch-bureaucrat”, the enemy of workers’ democracy and free Trade Unions. He creates the utterly false impression that the “militarisation of labour” was the standpoint of Trotsky alone and, by dint of his customary impressionism, hints that Trotsky carried through “his” policies against the majority of the Central Committee! Just how this feat was accomplished, Comrade Johnstone does not explain. He cannot do so because it is a plain lie.

On January 15, 1920, a government decree transformed the Army of the Urals into the first “revolutionary army of labour”. A later decree entrusted to the revolutionary council of the first labour army the “general direction of the work of restoring and strengthening the normal economic and military life in the Urals”. Similar powers were granted to the council of the labour armies of the Caucasus and the Ukraine. An army was sent to assist in the construction of a railway in Turkestan, another worked the Donetz coal mines. While Red soldiers helped in the running of industry, those workers who were not called up for military service were conscripted for the “Front of Labour” as explained above.

Was all this the work of the arch-bureaucrat Trotsky? On January 12, 1920, Lenin and Trotsky spoke on a joint platform to a meeting of Bolshevik trade union leaders. The object of the meeting was to persuade them to accept the policy of “militarisation of labour”. The motion of acceptance, tabled in the names of Lenin and Trotsky, was defeated, with only two votes cast in favour – those of Lenin and Trotsky. Imagine such an incident occurring in the time of Stalin or today!

This incident was not isolated. On every one of the main economic and political questions at this time, Lenin and Trotsky were in complete agreement. On the controversial question of employment of bourgeois specialists in the army and industry, Lenin and Trotsky fought a hard battle to get their proposals accepted by the rest of the Bolshevik Party leadership. Similarly, on the issue of one-man management and the agrarian policy, there was complete identity of views. On all of this, Monty Johnstone keeps mum. Such information would only upset the "balance" of his analysis.

Once again, the Trade Union Controversy

“In 1920 in addition to his job as Commissar for War, he [Trotsky] had taken over the Department of Transport, of vital economic and military importance. Placing the railwaymen and the workers in the railway repair workshops under martial law, he met the objections of the railwaymen’s union by dismissing its leaders and appointing others more compliant in their place. He did the same with other transport workers’ unions His efforts brought results: the railways were restored ahead of schedule.” (Cogito, p. 19)

By means of precisely that innuendo which was supposed not to feature in his work, Johnstone tries to create an impression of Trotsky, the arch bureaucrat, “taking over” the railways at gunpoint and, on his own initiative, bulldozing the workers in true Stalinist fashion. What are the facts?

The destruction of Russia’s vast railway networks was one of the most crippling blows to the economy dealt by the Civil War. Of 70,000 versts[1] of track, only 15,000 escaped damage. More than 60% of the locomotives were out of order. The dislocation of the economy caused by the breakdown of communications reached crisis point in 1920, when, unless drastic action was taken, the whole of Russian industry would suffer an irreversible catastrophe. Coming at the height of the Polish War, this meant that the fate of the revolution was in the balance.

The Ninth Party Congress, in a special resolution, declared that the main problem in overcoming the crisis on the railways was the railwaymen’s union. This was an old craft union, traditionally Menshevik, which had already clashed with the Bolshevik government on the question of control of the railways. The Ninth Party Congress, which placed Trotsky in charge of the work of restoring the railways, also empowered him to draft into the union a body of able and

loyal workers, to prod it into action. When the officials of the union refused to submit to the new regulations, not Trotsky, but the Central Committee of the Party decided to replace the old officials with a new committee composed of dedicated communists: only one vote was cast against, that of the “Right” Communist and Trade Union leader, Tomsky. The rest, including Lenin, Zinoviev and Stalin, all voted in favour.

Johnstone portrays Trotsky as the “evil genius” behind the “militarisation of labour” and War Communism. He conveniently forgets that Trotsky was the first of the Bolshevik leaders to advocate the abandonment of War Communism, as early as February, 1920. At that time, Trotsky submitted to the Central Committee a set of theses which pointed to the continued disruption of the economy, the weakening of the proletariat, and the widening gulf between town and country. He advocated the replacement of forced requisition of grain by a grain tax, and measures aimed at the partial restoration of the shattered market economy. In essence, these policies were subsequently adopted under the New Economic Policy.

Trotsky’s proposals, which were opposed by Lenin, were defeated in the Central Committee, which favoured the continuation of the policies of War Communism. Accepting that the “war” methods would have to be continued for a further period, against his own point of view, Trotsky endeavoured to make the system work as well as possible. It is for this crime that Trotsky is once again pilloried by Monty Johnstone who “acts dumb” about Trotsky’s opposition to the basis of War Communism itself.

Johnstone paints a portrait of Trotsky as the dictatorial “arch-bureaucrat” on the strength of a few extracts of a speech in which Trotsky criticised the liberal idealisation of “free labour” in the abstract, and pointed out that non-free labour could also be productive. The remark that chattel-slavery, in its day, had been progressive, indisputable from a Marxist point of view, is taken out of context and given a sinister twist by Monty Johnstone (following in the footsteps of Deutscher). Alas! The speech which Comrade Johnstone so eagerly snatches

from Deutscher’s ever-open palm was made, not at the Tenth Party Congress, but at the Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions, where Trotsky, as the spokesman for the Bolsheviks, was speaking, not against Lenin, but against the Mensheviks, whose tearful pleas for the “freedom of labour” Monty Johnstone now repeats so touchingly.

The Mensheviks, in order to discredit the Bolshevik government, used the measures which had been forced on the Soviet Republic by the conditions of Civil War and intervention in a thoroughly dishonest and unscrupulous way. Their arguments were a caricature so far as “democracy” and “free labour” were concerned. The Bolsheviks stood for the most complete freedom – even including freedom for bourgeois parties – provided they did not attempt armed rebellion against the Soviet power. But under the circumstances when the “liberal” bourgeoisie had fled to the camp of the White Armies, such talk amounted to the demand that the Revolution should not defend itself against White reaction. The alternative to the dictatorship of the proletariat was not, as the Mensheviks claimed, some kind of Weimar democracy. but the bloody rule of reaction. The Social-Democratic critics of Bolshevism were the sort of people who were quite prepared to act as accomplices of Imperialism in the bloody and obscene world war, but who threw up their hands in horror at the “ruthless” measures of Lenin and Trotsky. Yet it was their betrayal of the revolutionary movements of 1917-21 that paved the way for the rise of Nazism and a new and even more barbaric world war.

The differences among the Bolsheviks on the trade unions were not, as one would suppose from the vulgar portrait painted by Monty Johnstone, between the “arch-bureaucrat” Trotsky and Lenin the defender of “free labour”, but an expression of the crisis in the Party brought about by the impasse of War Communism. The original differences, as Lenin explained, were inconsequential. But small frictions in the leadership, under the given conditions, led to a series of divisions in the Party, with not two platforms, but five at least being put forward.

Lenin’s prime consideration at this time was to prevent a split in the leadership and to preserve the tenuous thread binding the proletariat and its vanguard to the non-proletarian and semi-proletarian masses. Under the prevailing conditions of economic crisis, of mass illiteracy, of a numerically weakened and increasingly demoralised working class, and above all, of the crushing preponderance of the petty-bourgeois peasant masses, the Bolshevik Party was increasingly coming under the pressure of alien class forces. The fact that the Bolsheviks had been forced, contrary to their intentions, to illegalise the opposition parties, meant that these pressures would inevitably seek to find expression through the Bolshevik Party itself. What Lenin feared most was a split in the Party along class lines. This lay at the basis of Lenin’s opposition to Trotsky’s original proposal to “shake up” the union officials and bring them into line with central planning, which caused friction with the Trade Union leader Tomsky.

Monty Johnstone begins his account of the trade union controversy with a quote from Lenin’s article The Party Crisis. Lenin had attempted to keep the differences within the leadership by setting up a commission to investigate the trade unions. In the course of the Central Committee discussion, Lenin, in his own words made a number of obviously exaggerated and therefore mistaken “attacks” which sharpened the conflict. Trotsky had refused to join the commission. Monty Johnstone quotes Lenin’s words of censure:

“This step alone causes Comrade Trotsky’s original mistake to become magnified and later to lead to factionalism.”

But this is one of Comrade Johnstone’s half quotes. Let us see what Lenin adds in the very next sentence:

“Without this step, his mistake (in submitting incorrect theses) remained a very minor one such as every member of the Central Committee, without exception, has had occasion to make.” (Works, vol. 32, p. 45)

Monty Johnstone's readers are allowed to read only as much of Lenin as he considers good for their health. By quoting only polemical rejoinders, Monty Johnstone "helps" Lenin by "sharpening" his struggle against Trotsky for him. Elsewhere in this section he repeatedly presents as the standpoint of Trotsky arguments which were consistently advanced and defended by Lenin and all the leaders of Bolshevism. Paraphrasing and "improving" Trotsky's arguments, Johnstone writes:

"Russia, he [Trotsky] argued repeatedly, suffered not from the excess but from the lack of efficient bureaucracy, [?] to which he [?] favoured giving certain limited concessions. Reporting this, Deutscher comments: 'He thus makes himself the spokesman of the managerial groups.'" (Cogito, p. 20)

Johnstone's invocation of the shade of Deutscher does not add the least odour of sanctity to his arguments. Anyone who has read Deutscher will know that he attacks not only the "dictatorial" ideas of Trotsky, but also of Lenin, and in fact does not distinguish between the two. His philistine appraisal of Trotsky is the identical twin of his views on Lenin, and on revolutionaries in general.

The arguments which Monty Johnstone puts in the mouth of Trotsky correspond exactly to the views advanced hundreds of times by Lenin on the need for efficiency, for business-like management, for specialists to whom Lenin "favoured giving certain limited concessions", not the outrageous "concessions" extracted by the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracies in Russia and Eastern Europe today, but simply and solely to get the shattered economy moving again, to enable the revolution to survive until the revolutionary proletariat of Europe could come to its assistance. Once again, Johnstone presents as "Trotskyism" the ideas of Lenin, of the Bolshevik Party, of Marxism itself. But this merely underlines the profound gulf which separates all the ideologists of Stalinism from the ideas and traditions of Bolshevism. Bending the arguments, Johnstone puts Lenin's words in the mouth of Trotsky; and on the lips of Lenin, the arguments of those true defenders of the caricatures of free labour – the

Mensheviks.

Lenin on the Trade Unions

“In practice, said Lenin, the Soviet state was ‘a workers state with bureaucratic distortions’. For a long time, he argued, the trade unions would need to ‘struggle against the bureaucratic distortions of the Soviet apparatus’, and for ‘the protection of the material and spiritual interests of the masses of the toilers by the ways and means that this apparatus cannot employ’.” (Cogito, p. 21)

What is the meaning of this quotation? Not that Lenin differed from Trotsky in the estimation of the state apparatus and its bureaucratic deformations. The point at issue was the immediate policy to be adopted if the system of War Communism was to be maintained. However, what is really interesting and significant is the fact that throughout this entire section of his work, Monty Johnstone does not make clear a single one of Lenin’s arguments on the trade union question. And this is no accident.

Lenin argued, dialectically, that the trade unions in a workers’ state must be independent, in order that the working class can defend itself against the state, and in turn defend the workers’ state itself. Lenin was emphatic on this point because he saw the danger of the state raising itself above the class and separating itself from it. The workers, by themselves through their organisations, could exercise a check on the state apparatus and on the bureaucracy.

It is ironical to read Johnstone’s strictures on Trotsky’s alleged “bureaucratic tendencies”, in the light of what happened to the “independence of the trade unions” in Russia under Stalin and the position today. Evidently, when Trotsky was “in power” he was a bureaucrat; when Stalin was in power, he, regrettably also succumbed to the “Cult of Personality”. It is all a question of “personalities”! This is the method, not of Marxism, but of the middle-class

vulgarians, who see politics in terms of individuals who “sell out” as soon as they come to power. And yet, despite this highly “critical” approach Monty Johnstone’s critical faculties evaporate into thin air as soon as we reach the famous “Twentieth Congress”:

“Trotsky is presented by his supporters [!] as the champion of the struggle against bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Since during the last seventeen years of his life Trotsky was tireless in his denunciation of many aspects [?] of Stalin’s bureaucratic regime that the Soviet Communist Party was to unmask [?] in 1956, the Trotskyist claim appears plausible. However, as we shall see the truth is considerably more complex.” (Cogito, p. 19)

Indeed, the truth is “considerably more complex”! What sort of “unmasking” was performed by Khruschev and Co. in 1956? That Stalin was a tyrant, a slayer, a mass murderer, a madman, etc? That Khruschev, Brezhnev, Kosygin and the others all stood trembling in their shoes before the dictatorship (as the Soviet “Communist” Party apparently only “discovered” in 1956!) but for Marxists the problem only begins there. What is more important are the social relations which could produce such a monstrosity. And the vital question in relation to the Twentieth Congress is: What has changed since 1956?

As early as 1920, Lenin saw the processes which were taking place in the Soviet state apparatus. All his material on the Trade Union question, which is not dealt with by Monty Johnstone, is concerned with the idea of the workers and their organisations as a check on the bureaucracy, its accumulative tendencies, corruption, waste, and mismanagement. Lenin saw the development of a healthy workers democracy and of the gradual withering away of the state as indispensable for the movement towards socialism.

For Monty Johnstone, to judge from his boundless admiration of Khruschev’s “unmasking” activities, Russia and Eastern Europe are now healthy socialist countries, busily eliminating all traces of bureaucratism, cult of personality, and

Stalinism generally – with the exception of a number of “regrettable” (and, apparently, inexplicable) incidents such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the frame-up trials of the writers, which, evidently bear no relation at all to the general state of affairs!

Monty Johnstone’s quotation from Lenin on the bureaucratisation of the state and the role of the unions must have been made tongue in cheek.

Since 1956, the Russian bureaucracy has been forced to remove a number of the most barbaric practices of the Stalin regime – practices, which under capitalism, would only be possible in a fascist state – such as slave-labour, etc. But for all that, the police-state and the terror remain; only the names have changed. The situation with regard to the trade unions in Russia shows the complete falsity of the assertion that the bureaucracy is reforming itself out of existence. We ask Monty Johnstone: Thirteen years after the Twentieth Congress, where are the independent trade unions in the Soviet Union?

Under Stalin, the elementary rights of the Soviet working class were taken away. Today, under his heirs, Brezhnev and Kosygin, there is no right to strike, no right to collective bargaining, no right to elect democratic factory committees (rights which existed under Lenin and Trotsky, even in the blackest period of the Civil War). The trade unions in Russia and Eastern Europe are a caricature: a belt for the transmission to the working class of the orders of the bureaucratic overlords. The monstrous corruption, waste and mismanagement which Lenin wished to hold in check by means of the workers’ organisations, has today reached proportions which threaten to undermine the advances made by the Soviet working class on the basis of the planned economy.[2]

It is a crying contradiction, which any thinking member of the Young Communist League or Communist Party will see, that the weak, embattled Soviet Republic at the time of Lenin and Trotsky, despite the bureaucratic deformations to which Lenin honestly refers, nevertheless guaranteed the

freedom and independence of both the trade unions and the Party. Young Communist Leaguers should take the trouble to read the material of the Tenth Party Congress in Lenin's Works and ask themselves honestly: could such a free discussion of the issues take place in any "Communist" Party today?

In contrast to the period of Civil War and NEP, when the Bolsheviks were forced by the weakness of the Soviet power and the threat of capitalist restoration to restrict certain democratic rights as a temporary, emergency measure, the Soviet Union today is the second industrial nation in the world. And yet, the bureaucracy is terrified at the prospect of granting even the most basic democratic rights to the Soviet workers. Thus in Czechoslovakia, the relative independence of the trade unions which the workers wrested from the bureaucracy after the fall of Novotny, provoked the boot of Russian reaction. So afraid were the Brezhnevs and Kosygins of the effect this would have on the Soviet working class!

Monty Johnstone's attempt to pose as the friend of the "freedom of labour" against the "arch-bureaucrat" Trotsky sounds all the more hollow when one compares the situation in the Soviet Union today to even Franco's Spain. There, too, certain "concessions" have been granted to the working class, out of fear of revolution. The difference is that whereas even in Spain, where the trade unions are illegal, the workers, have set up genuine organisation – the illegal "Workers' Commissions", which conduct strikes and struggle on behalf of the class and even negotiate with the bosses, in "Socialist" Russia, anyone who attempted to organise on these lines would soon find himself behind bars.

In reality, mirrored in the trade union issue is the whole question of social relations in the Soviet Union and the other bureaucratically deformed worker's states. To talk about advancing to socialism (or "Communism"!) implies the full, free development of the working class as the ruling class in society controlling, checking and accounting. It means the involvement of the whole of society in the planning and running of industry and of the state, with the corresponding melting away of bureaucracy. This is the only guarantee of the transition to a

classless society. Socialist planning needs the check of workers' democracy as the human body needs oxygen.

The bureaucratic, totalitarian set-up in the USSR is not only oppressive to the Soviet working class and repellent to the workers of the West. It is also increasingly an impediment to the free and harmonious development of the productive forces in the Soviet Union. It is a crushing indictment of the caricature of socialism that, fifty years after the October Revolution, the workers lack even those elements of democracy which are present in advanced capitalist countries. While the bureaucracy boasts of "building Communism" the death-penalty had been reintroduced – for economic offences – such is the extent of swindling, corruption and theft which bedevils the Soviet economy – a concrete proof of the bankruptcy of the regime and the need for workers' democracy. The Soviet workers will inevitably come to understand that the only way out for them is the programme of Lenin and Trotsky. When they realise that, they will realise it, the days of the bureaucracy will be numbered.

The Tenth Party Congress and the NEP

The Tenth Party Congress took place in an atmosphere of crisis; the period of "War Communism" had entered its last, most convulsive phase. Armed peasants uprisings took place in a series of provinces, culminating in a serious insurrection in Tambov. Discontent spread to the hungry towns. In February, 1921 a series of strikes broke out in Petrograd because of the shortage of bread. Menshevik elements took advantage of the unrest to put forward the counter-revolutionary slogan of "Soviets without Communists".

In this context as Lenin said, the debate on the Trade Unions was an "impermissible luxury", which was "pushing to the forefront a question which for objective reasons cannot be there." The real point at issue was not the immediate question of the trade unions – but this served as a catalyst which crystallised a number of clearly defined tendencies within the party.

The end of the Civil War, and especially the demobilisation of the Red Army, deepened the crisis and discontent of the peasant masses. Lenin explained that certain opposition currents in the party were "bound up with the tremendous preponderance of peasants in the country, with their dissatisfaction with the proletarian dictatorship." The question of the trade unions shrank before these issues which exploded in the middle of the Congress in the Kronstadt uprising.

The Kronstadt uprising undoubtedly reflected the growing mood of disillusionment with War Communism among the masses, first and foremost of the more backward and peasant elements, but increasingly among workers whose morale had been undermined by years of war, civil war and famine. Faced with the implacable opposition of the peasant masses, the revolution was forced to retreat. The requisition of grain was abolished and replaced by a tax, and

measures were taken to restore the market economy, to encourage a measure of private trade. Certain industries were even denationalised, but the major levers of the economy, the banks, insurance companies, the large industries, together with the monopoly of foreign trade, remained in the hands of the state.

These concessions to bourgeois “freedom” were not made light-heartedly as a victory over the “arch-bureaucracy” of War Communism, but as a retreat under pressure, as temporary concessions granted to the petty-bourgeois masses in order to prevent a split between the workers and peasants which would lead to the fall of Soviet power.

Defending these concessions at the Tenth Congress, Lenin referred to the crushing pressure of the peasant masses on the working class as “a far greater danger than all the Denikins, Kolchaks, and Yudenichs put together. It would be fatal,” he continued, “to be deluded on this score! The difficulties stemming from the petty-bourgeois element are enormous, and if they are to be overcome, we must have greater unity, and I don’t just mean a resemblance of unity. We must all pull together with a single will, for in a peasant country only the will of the mass of the proletarians will enable the proletariat to accomplish the great task of its leadership and dictatorship. Assistance is on its way from the Western European countries but it is not coming quickly enough. Still it is coming and growing.” (Works, vol. 32, p. 179)

Lenin, as always, put the matter clearly and honestly. The retreat of the NEP had been dictated by the enormous pressure of the peasantry on the workers’ state, isolated by the delay of the socialist revolution in the West. Lenin always referred to it as a temporary state of affairs, a “breathing space”, before the next dramatic developments of the international socialist revolution. But he was also acutely aware of the dangers that lay on that road, especially the dangers of a revival of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements with the growth of the market economy:

“This peril – the development of small production and of the petty-bourgeois in the rural areas – is an extremely serious one,” Lenin warned the Tenth Congress. In answer to those who were inclined to complacency, Lenin emphasised the point: “Do we have classes? Yes we do. Do we have a class struggle? Yes and a most furious one!” (Works, vol. 32, p. 212)

Monty Johnstone gives a completely one-sided account of the Tenth Congress, heavily emphasising the trade union question, omitting all references to the main issues involved, and dealing with the trade union question in a one-sided manner – posing the question once more as a “battle royal” between Lenin and Trotsky, while failing to mention the other positions advanced – of Bukharin, the so-called “Workers’ Opposition” and the “Democratic Centralists”, for instance. Yet again, these omissions enable Monty Johnstone to create a completely false impression. The sheer cynicism of his approach can best be seen from his attempt to identify Trotsky’s position on the trade unions with the decision of the Congress to ban factions in the Party:

“Organising a faction around the ideas expressed in his pamphlet … he [Trotsky] launched a debate in the Party, culminating at the Tenth Congress in March 1921, in his overwhelming defeat and a decision to ban factions in the Party.” (Cogito, p. 20)

This is news indeed! No one at the Tenth Congress ever accused Trotsky of “organising a faction” around anything. This particular piece of Johnstonian innuendo is evidently meant to link-up with Lenin’s polemical rejoinder about Trotsky’s earlier “factionalism” (i.e. his refusal to join the committee to investigate the Trade Unions). Johnstone knows perfectly well that the decision to ban factions was taken for reasons not connected with either the trade union discussion or Trotsky’s role in that discussion.

The reasons are given in the passage quoted from Lenin above, which clearly explains that this extraordinary measure was dictated by the dangers of alien

class pressure expressing themselves through groups in the Party. In the immediate context of the Tenth Congress, the measure was directed, not against Trotsky, but expressly against the so-called “Workers’ Opposition”, a quasi-syndicalist group led by Shlyapoikov and Kollontai, which was formally dissolved by the Congress. The resolution on this point clearly explains the reasons for the measure:

“The said deviation is due partly to the influx into the party of former Mensheviks, and also of workers and peasants who have not yet fully assimilated the communist world outlook. Mainly, however, this deviation is due to the influence exercised upon the proletariat and on the Russian Communist Party by the petty-bourgeois element, which is exceptionally strong in our country and which inevitably engenders vacillation towards anarchism, particularly at times when the condition of the masses has greatly deteriorated as a consequence of the crop failure and the devastating effects of war, and when the demobilisation of the army numbering millions sets loose thousands of peasants and workers, unable immediately to find regular means of livelihood.” (Works, vol. 32, p. 245)

Precisely in the debate on the “Workers’ Opposition”, Lenin made a statement which completely gives the lie to the innuendoes of Monty Johnstone about Trotsky’s alleged “factionalism”:

“The Workers’ Opposition said: ‘Lenin and Trotsky will unite.’ Trotsky came out and said: ‘Those who fail to understand that it is necessary to unite are against the Party; of course we will unite, because we are men of the Party.’ I supported him. Of course, Comrade Trotsky and I differed; and when more or less equal groups appear within the Central Committee, the Party will pass judgement, and in such a way that will make us unite in accordance with the Party’s will and instructions.” (Works, vol. 32, p. 204)

Notes

[1] 1 verst is equal to 1.067 kilometres

[2] For a detailed analysis of this, see Ted Grant, Russia – From revolution to counter-revolution.

7. Lenin’s Struggle Against Bureaucracy

“In the last period of his life Lenin was desperately concerned about the growth of bureaucracy in the Soviet state and in the Party.” (Cogito, p. 22)

Monty Johnstone, having given one paragraph to the Russian Revolution, and one paragraph to the Civil War, maintains his “balance” by granting an equal amount of space to Lenin’s struggle against the forces of internal reaction in the Soviet state and party.

How did Lenin deal with the question of the Soviet bureaucracy? Did he simply remain “desperately concerned” about it? Or did he attempt something which our “theoreticians” of the Communist Parties today persistently avoid, namely an analysis of the causes of bureaucracy in order to wage an implacable struggle against it?

Monty Johnstone refers to “bureaucracy” as if it were simply a matter of “bureaucratic behaviour”, excessive red-tape, officialdom, etc. Such an approach has nothing in common with the Marxist method, which explains bureaucracy as a social phenomenon, which arises for definite reasons. Lenin, approaching the question as a Marxist, explained the rise of bureaucracy as a parasitic, capitalist growth on the organism of the workers’ state, which arose out of the isolation of the revolution in a backward, illiterate peasant country.

In one of his last articles, ‘Better Fewer, But Better’, Lenin wrote:

“Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first

think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past, which, although it has been overthrown, has not yet been overcome, not yet reached the stage of a culture that has receded into the past." (Works, vol. 33, p. 487)

The October revolution had overthrown the old order, ruthlessly suppressed and purged the Tsarist state; but in conditions of chronic economic and cultural backwardness, the elements of the old order were everywhere creeping back into positions of privilege and power in the measure that the revolutionary wave ebbed back with the defeats of the international revolution. Engels explained that in every society where art, science and government are the exclusive of a privileged minority, then that minority will always use and abuse its positions in its own interests. And this state of affairs is inevitable, so long as the vast majority of the people are forced to toil for long hours in industry and agriculture for the bare necessities of life.

After the revolution, with the ruined condition of industry, the working day was not reduced, but lengthened. Workers toiled ten, twelve hours and more a day on subsistence rations; many worked weekends without pay voluntarily. But, as Trotsky explained, the masses can only sacrifice their "today" for their "tomorrow" up to a very definite limit. Inevitably, the strain of war, of revolution, of four years of bloody Civil War, of a famine in which five million perished, all served to undermine the working class in terms of both numbers and morale.

The NEP stabilised the economy, but created new dangers by encouraging the growth of small capitalism, especially in the countryside where the rich "kulaks" gained ground at the expense of the poor peasants. Industry revived, but, being tied to the demand of the peasantry, especially the rich peasants, the revival was confined almost entirely to light industry (consumer goods). Heavy industry, the key to socialist construction, stagnated. By 1922 there were two million unemployed in the towns. At the Ninth Congress of Soviets in December, 1921, Lenin remarked:

“Excuse me, but what do you describe as the proletariat? That class of labourers which is employed by large-scale industry. But where is this large-scale industry? What sort of proletariat is this? Where is your industry? Why is it idle?” (Works, vol. 33, p. 174)

In a speech at the Eleventh Party Congress in March, 1922, Lenin pointed out that the class nature of many who worked in the factories at this time was non-proletarian; that many were dodgers from military service, peasants and de-classed elements:

“During the war people who were by no means proletarians went into the factories; they went into the factories to dodge war. And are the social and economic conditions in our country today such as to induce real proletarians to go into the factories? No. It would be true according to Marx; but Marx did not write about Russia; he wrote about capitalism as a whole, beginning with the fifteenth century. It held true over a period of six hundred years, but it is not true for present-day Russia. Very often those who go into the factories are not proletarians; they are casual elements of every description.” (Works, vol. 33, p. 299)

The disintegration of the working class, the loss of many of the most advanced elements in the Civil War, the influx of backward elements from the countryside, and the demoralisation and exhaustion of the masses was one side of the picture. On the other side, the forces of reaction, those petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements who had been temporarily demoralised and driven underground by the success of the revolution in Russia and internationally, everywhere began to recover their nerve, thrust themselves to the fore, taking advantage of the situation to insinuate themselves into every nook and cranny of the ruling bodies of industry, of the state and even of the Party.

Immediately after the seizure of power, the only political party which was suppressed by the Bolsheviks was the fascist Black Hundreds. Even the bourgeois Cadet Party was not immediately illegalised. The government itself was a coalition of Bolsheviks and Left Social-Revolutionaries. But, under the pressure of the Civil War, a sharp polarisation of class forces took place in which the Mensheviks, SRs and “Left SRs” came out on the side of the counter-revolution. Contrary to their own intention, the Bolsheviks were forced to introduce a monopoly of political power. This monopoly, which was regarded as an extraordinary and temporary state of affairs, created enormous dangers in the situation where the proletarian vanguard was coming under increasing pressure from alien classes.

In February, 1917, the Bolshevik Party had no more than 23,000 members in the whole of Russia. At the height of the Civil War, when party membership involved personal risk, the ranks were thrown open to the workers, who pushed the membership to 200,000. But as the war grew to a close, the party membership actually trebled reflecting an influx of careerists and elements from hostile classes and parties.

Lenin at this time repeatedly emphasised the danger of the Party succumbing to the pressures and moods of the petty-bourgeois masses; that the main enemy of the revolution was:

“everyday economics in a small-peasant country with a ruined large industry. He is the petty-bourgeois element which surrounds us like the air, and penetrates deep into the ranks of the proletariat. And the proletariat is de-classed, i.e. dislodged from its class groove. The factories and mills are idle – the proletariat is weak, scattered, enfeebled. On the other hand the petty-bourgeois element within the country is backed by the whole international bourgeoisie, which retains its power throughout the world.” (Works, vol. 33, p. 23)

The “purge” initiated by Lenin in 1921 had nothing in common with the

monstrous frame-up trials of Stalin; there was no police, no trials, no prison-camps; merely the ruthless weeding out of petty-bourgeois and Menshevik elements from the ranks of the Party, in order to preserve the ideas and traditions of October from the poisonous effects of petty-bourgeois reaction. By early 1922, some 200,000 members (one-third of the membership) had been expelled.

Lenin's correspondence and writings of this period, when illness was increasingly preventing him from intervene in the struggle, clearly indicate his alarm at the encroachment of the Soviet bureaucracy, the insolent parvenus in every corner of the state apparatus. Thus, in a letter to Sheinman in February, 1922:

"At present the State Bank is a bureaucratic power game. There is the truth for you, if you want to hear not the sweet communist-official lies (with which everyone feeds you as a high mandarin), but the truth. And if you do not want to look at this truth with open eyes, through all the communist lying, you are a man who has perished in the prime of life in a swamp of official lying. Now that is an unpleasant truth, but it is the truth." (Works, vol. 36, p. 567)

Contrast this fearless honesty of Lenin with all the saccharine falsehoods with which all the Communist Party leaders and "theoreticians" fed the international communist movement about the Soviet Union for generations, and judge for yourself the depths of degradation in which the self-styled "Friends of the Soviet Union" have plunged the ideas and traditions of Lenin! Again, in a letter dated April 12, 1922:

"The more such work is done, the deeper we go into living practice, distracting the attention of both ourselves and our readers from the stinking bureaucratic and stinking intellectual Moscow (and, in general, Soviet bourgeois) atmospheres, the greater will be our success in improving both our press and all our constructive work." (Works, vol. 36, p. 579)

At the Eleventh Congress, Lenin placed before the Party a searing indictment of bureaucratisation of the state apparatus:

“If we take Moscow,” he said, “with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take the huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can be truthfully said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed.” (Works, vol. 33, p. 288, our emphasis)

To carry out the work of weeding bureaucrats and careerists out of the state and party apparatus, Lenin initiated the setting up of RABKRIN (the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate) with Stalin in charge. Lenin saw the need for a strong organiser to see that this work was carried out thoroughly; Stalin’s record as a party organiser appeared to qualify him for the post. Within a few years, Stalin occupied a number of organisational posts in the Party: head of RABKRIN, member of the Central Committee and Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat. But his narrow, organisational outlook and personal ambition led Stalin to occupy the post, in a short space of time, as the chief spokesman of bureaucracy in the party leadership, not as its opponent.

As early as 1920, Trotsky criticised the working of RABKRIN, which from a tool in the struggle against bureaucracy was becoming itself a hotbed of bureaucracy. Initially, Lenin defended RABKRIN against Trotsky. His illness prevented him from realising what was going on behind his back in the state and party. Stalin used his position, which enabled him to select personnel to leading posts in the state and party to quietly gather round himself a bloc of allies and yes-men, political nonentities who were grateful to him for their advancement. In his hands, RABKRIN became an instrument for building up his own position and eliminating his political rivals.

Lenin only became aware of the terrible situation when he discovered the truth about Stalin's handling of relations with Georgia. Without the knowledge of Lenin or the Politburo, Stalin, together with his henchmen Dzerzhinsky and Ordzhonikidze, had carried out a coup d'état in Georgia. The finest cadres of Georgian Bolshevism were purged, and the party leaders denied access to Lenin, who was fed a string of lies by Stalin. When he finally found out what was happening, Lenin was furious. From his sick-bed late in 1922 he dictated a series of notes to his stenographer on "the notorious questions of autonomisation, which, it appears, is officially called the question of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics".

Lenin's notes are a crushing indictment of the bureaucratic and chauvinist arrogance of Stalin and his clique. But Lenin does not treat this incident as an accidental phenomenon – a "regrettable mistake", like the invasion of Czechoslovakia, or a "tragedy", like the crushing of the Hungarian worker's commune, but the expression of the rotten, reactionary nationalism of the Soviet bureaucracy. It is worth quoting Lenin's words on the state apparatus at length.

"It is said that a united state apparatus was needed. Where did that assurance come from? Did it not come from the same Russian apparatus, which, as I pointed out in one of the preceding sections of my diary, we took over from Tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil?

"There is no doubt that that measure should have been delayed until we could say, that we vouched for our apparatus as our own. But now, we must, in all conscience, admit the contrary; the state apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us; it is a bourgeois and Tsarist hotchpotch and there has been no possibility of getting rid of it in the past five years without the help of other countries and because we have been "busy" most of the time with military engagements and the fight against famine.

"It is quite natural that in such circumstances the 'freedom to secede from the

union' by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is. There is no doubt that the infinitesimal percentage of Soviet and sovietised workers will drown in that tide of chauvinistic Great-Russian riff-raff like a fly in milk." (Works, vol. 36, p. 605, our emphasis)

After the Georgian affair, Lenin threw the whole weight of his authority behind the struggle to remove Stalin from the post of General Secretary of the party which he occupied in 1922, after the death of Sverdlov. However, Lenin's main fear now more than ever was that an open split in the leadership, under prevailing conditions, might lead to the break-up of the party along class lines. He therefore attempted to keep the struggle confined to the leadership, and the notes and other material were not made public. Lenin wrote secretly to the Georgian Bolshevik-Leninists (sending copies to Trotsky and Kamenev) taking up their cause against Stalin "with all my heart". As he was unable to pursue the affair in person, he wrote to Trotsky requesting him to undertake the defence of the Georgians in the Central Committee.

Needless to say, the documentary evidence of Lenin's last fight against Stalin and the bureaucracy has been suppressed for decades. Lenin's last writings were hidden from the Communist Party rank-and-file in Russia and internationally. Lenin's last letter to the Party Congress, despite the protests of his widow, was not read out at the Congress and remained under lock and key until 1956 when Khruschev and Co. published it, along with a few other items (including the letters on Georgia) as part of their campaign to throw the blame for all that had happened in the past thirty years on to Stalin's shoulders.

Monty Johnstone and his like sneer at the material of Lenin – letters, minutes, etc. – suppressed by the Soviet bureaucracy, which has been published in the West "on Trotsky's authority". But the same wretched Jesuits of Stalinism also dismissed as "forgeries" the Suppressed Testament and Lenin's last letters, published by Trotskyists, not after the Twentieth Congress (of blessed memory)

but thirty years before the Communist Party leaders were prepared to admit their existence. Communist Party members and Young Communist Leaguers must ask themselves honestly whose word they prefer to take: that of Trotsky and his followers who told the truth about Lenin's struggle against Stalinist bureaucracy and published works which the Communist Party leaders had denied to their rank-and-file for a whole historical period, or that of Monty Johnstone and his friends whose entire political past indicates their complete dishonesty in regard to the heritage of Lenin and the history of the Russian revolution.

Monty Johnstone quotes odd passages from Lenin's Suppressed Testament, but nowhere does he make clear what the content of that letter was. Lenin warns of the danger of a split in the Party, because "our party rests upon two classes, and for that reason its instability is possible…" Lenin did not see the disagreement between Trotsky and Stalin as accidental, or flowing from "personalities" (although he gives a series of penetrating sketches of the personal characteristics of the leading members of the Party).

Lenin's last letter must be seen in the context of his other writings of the previous few months, his attacks on bureaucracy and the bloc which he formed with Trotsky against Stalin. Lenin worded his letter very cautiously (he had originally intended to be present at the Congress for which according to his stenographer Fotieva, he had "prepared a bombshell for Stalin"). For each of the leading members, he gives both the positive and negative features of their character: in Trotsky's case, he refers to his "exceptional abilities" ("the most able man on the Central Committee at the present time") but criticises him for his "far-reaching self-confidence" and "a tendency to be too much attracted by the purely administrative side of affairs" – faults which, however serious they may be in themselves, have nothing whatsoever to do with the Permanent Revolution, "Socialism in one Country", or any of the other canards invented by the Stalinists.

In relation to Stalin, Lenin writes that "Comrade Stalin having become General Secretary, has concentrated enormous power in his hands, and I am not sure that

he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution."

That is already a political question, and linked up with Lenin's struggle against the bureaucracy in the Party. In 'Better Fewer, But Better', written shortly before, Lenin commented: "Let it be said in parentheses that we have bureaucrats in our Party offices as well as in Soviet offices." In the same work, he launched a sharp attack on RABKRIN, which was clearly meant for Stalin:

"Let us say frankly that the People's Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection does not at present enjoy the slightest authority. Everybody knows that no other institutions are worse organised than those of our Workers' and Peasants' Inspection and that under present conditions nothing can be expected from this Peoples' Commissariat." (Works, vol. 33, p. 490)

In a postscript to his letter, Lenin advocated the removal of Stalin from the post of General Secretary, ostensibly on grounds of "rudeness" – but advocating his replacement with a man "who in all respects differs from Stalin only in superiority – namely, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, etc." The diplomatic mode of expression does not conceal the indirect accusation, very clear in the light of the Georgian events, of Stalin's rudeness, capriciousness and disloyalty.

In presenting Lenin's Testament as a document merely concerned with the "personalities" of the leaders, the Communist Party "theoreticians" fall into a completely vulgar misrepresentation of Lenin. Even if the Testament leaves room for ambiguity (it does not, except for slovenly minds) the whole body of Lenin's last writings provide a clear programmatic statement of his position, which cannot be distorted.

Repeatedly, Lenin characterised the bureaucracy as a parasitic, bourgeois growth

on the workers' state, and an expression of the petty-bourgeois outlook – which penetrated the State and even the Party.

The petty-bourgeois reaction against October was all the more difficult to combat because of the exhausted state of the proletariat, sections of which were also becoming demoralised. Nonetheless, Lenin and Trotsky saw the working class as the only basis for a struggle against bureaucracy, and the maintenance of a healthy workers' democracy as the only check on it. Thus, in one article Purging the Party Lenin wrote:

"Naturally, we shall not submit to everything the masses say because the masses, too, sometimes – particularly in time of exceptional weariness and exhaustion resulting from excessive hardship and suffering – yield to sentiments that are in no way advanced. But in appraising persons, in the negative attitude to those who have "attached" themselves to us for selfish motives, to those who have become "puffed-up commissars" and "bureaucrats", the suggestions of the non-Party proletarian masses and, in many cases, of the non-Party peasant masses, are extremely valuable." (Works, vol. 33, p. 39)

The rise of bureaucracy was understood by Lenin as the product of economic and cultural backwardness which was the result of the isolation of the revolution. The means of combating this were linked, on the one hand, with the struggle for economic progress and the gradual elimination of illiteracy, which was linked inseparably with the struggle to involve the working masses in the running of industry and the state. Lenin and Trotsky always relied upon the masses in the fight against the "puffed-up commissars". Only by the conscious self-activity of the working people themselves could the transition to socialism be assured.

On the other hand, Lenin repeatedly explained that the terrible strains imposed upon the working class by the isolation of the revolution in a backward country put immense difficulties in the way of the creation of a really cultured, and harmonious, classless society. Time and again Lenin stressed the problems that

arose from the isolation of the revolution. Monty Johnstone asserts that Lenin, towards the end of his life, was coming to accept the position of “Socialism in One Country”, citing as proof of this the statement in On Co-operation that “NEP Russia will be transformed into socialist Russia” since it possessed “all that is necessary and sufficient” for building a socialist society. (Cogito, p. 29)

Comrade Johnstone, after a desperate search through Lenin’s Selected Works, can find only one quotation which can be even vaguely interpreted as implying the acceptance of the idea of “Socialism in One Country”. Alas! the vagueness is dispelled by even a cursory glance at the text of this rough, uncorrected document which the Stalinists attempted, after Lenin’s death, to summon to their aid. What Lenin is referring to in this article is not the “building of socialism” within the frontiers of the Tsarist empire, but the social forms which are necessary to carry out the gradual elimination of the elements of “state capitalism” (NEP) and then begin the tasks of socialist construction (electrification, industrialisation, etc.). Lenin’s careful qualifications, which emphasise the absence of the material basis for socialism, leave no doubt as to his position. Thus, referring to the need for a “cultural revolution” for the overcoming of material backwardness (and therefore of class conflicts in society) Lenin wrote:

“This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country; but it presents immense difficulties of a purely cultural (for we are illiterate) and material character (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, must have a certain material base).” (On Co-operation, Works, vol. 33, p. 475)

To cover himself against possible misrepresentation, Lenin, in any case, explains that he is dealing with the question of education in abstraction from the problem of the international position of the revolution:

“I should say that emphasis is shifting to educational work … were it not for the

fact that we have to fight for our position on a world scale. If we leave that aside, however, and confine ourselves to internal economic relations, the emphasis is shifting to education." (ibid., p. 474)

Far from Lenin "in the last period of his working life coming more and more in practice" to adopt the perspectives of Socialism in One Country, Lenin resolutely explained that the difficulties of the revolution: the problems of backwardness, of illiteracy, of bureaucracy could only finally be overcome by the victory of the socialist revolution in one or several advanced countries. This perspective, which was hammered home by Lenin hundreds of times from 1904-5 onwards, was accepted as a truism by the entire Bolshevik Party up to 1924. In the last months of his life, Lenin never lost sight of this fact. Among his last writings are a series of notes which made his position abundantly clear:

"We have created a Soviet type of state," he wrote, "and by that we have ushered in a new era in world history, the era of the political rule of the proletariat, which is to supersede the era of bourgeois rule. Nobody can deprive us of this, either, although the Soviet type of state will have the finishing touches put to it only with the aid of the practical experience of the working class of several countries.

"But we have not finished building even the foundations of socialist economy and the hostile power of moribund capitalism can still deprive us of that. We must clearly appreciate this and frankly admit it; for there is nothing more dangerous than illusions (and vertigo, particularly at high altitudes). And there is absolutely nothing terrible, nothing that should give legitimate grounds for the slightest despondency, in admitting this bitter truth; we have always urged and reiterated the elementary truth of Marxism – that the joint efforts of the workers of several advanced countries are needed for the victory of socialism." (Works, vol. 33, p. 206, our emphasis)

In these lines of Lenin there is not an ounce of "pessimism" or of "underestimation" of the creative capacities of the Soviet working class. In all

the writings of Lenin, and especially of this period, there is at once a burning faith in the ability of the working people to change society and a fearless honesty in dealing with difficulties. The difference in the attitudes of Stalinism and Leninism towards the working class lies precisely in this: that the former seeks to deceive the masses with “official” lies and smug illusions about the building of “Socialism in One Country” in order to lull them into passive acceptance of the leadership of the bureaucracy, while the latter strives to develop the consciousness of the working class, never patronising it with lies and fairy-stories, but always revealing unpalatable truths, in the full confidence that the working class will understand and accept the need for the greatest sacrifices, provided the reasons for them are explained honestly and truthfully.

The arguments of Lenin were designed, not to stupefy the Soviet workers with “socialist opium”, but to steel them for the struggles ahead – for the struggle against backwardness and bureaucracy in Russia and for the struggle against capitalism and for the socialist revolution on a world scale. It was the sympathy of the working people of the world, Lenin explained, that prevented the imperialists from strangling the Russian Revolution in 1917-20. But the only real safeguard for the future of the Soviet Republic was the extension of the Revolution to the capitalist countries of the West.

At the Eleventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party – the last which Lenin attended – he emphasised repeatedly the dangers to the State and Party arising out of the pressures of backwardness and bureaucracy. Commenting on the direction of the State, Lenin warned:

“Well, we have lived through a year, the state is in our hands, but has it operated the New Economic Policy in the way we wanted in the past year? No. But we refuse to admit that it did not operate in the way we wanted. How did it operate? The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it. It was like a car that was going not in the direction the driver desired but in the direction someone else desired; as if it were being driven by some mysterious, lawless hand, God knows whose, perhaps of a profiteer, or of a private capitalist, or of both. Be that as it

may, the car is not going quite in the direction the man at the wheel imagines, and often it goes in an altogether different direction." (Works, vol. 33, p. 179, our emphasis)

At the same Congress Lenin explained, in a very clear and unambiguous language, the possibility of the degeneration of the revolution as a result of the pressure of alien classes. Already the most farsighted sections of the émigré bourgeoisie, the Smena Vekh group of Ustryalov, were openly placing their hopes upon the bureaucratic-bourgeois tendencies manifesting themselves in Soviet society, as a step in the direction of capitalist restoration. The same group was later to applaud and encourage the Stalinists in their struggle against "Trotskyism". The Smena Vekh group, which Lenin gave credit for its class insight, correctly understood the struggle of Stalin against Trotsky, not in terms of "personalities" but as a class question, as a step away from the revolutionary traditions of October.

"The machine no longer obeyed the driver" – the State was no longer under the control of the Communists, of the workers, but was increasingly raising itself above society. Referring to the views of Smena Vekh, Lenin said:

"We must say frankly that the things Ustryalov speaks about are possible, history knows all sorts of metamorphoses. Relying on firmness of convictions, loyalty, and other splendid moral qualities is anything but a serious attitude in politics. A few people may be endowed with splendid moral qualities, but historical issues are decided by vast masses, which, if the few do not suit them, may at times treat them none too politely." (Works, vol. 33, p. 287)

In these words of Lenin we find the defeat of the Left Opposition explained in advance with a million times more clarity than in all the pretentious theorising of the "intellectuals" about the relative psychological, moral and personal attributes of Trotsky and Stalin. The State power was slipping out of the hands of the Communists, not because of their personal failings or psychological

peculiarities, but because of the enormous pressures of backwardness, of bureaucracy, of alien class forces, which weighed down upon the tiny handful of advanced, socialist workers and crushed them.

Lenin likened the relationship of the Soviet workers and their advanced guard to the bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeois and capitalist elements to that of a conquering and conquered nation. History has shown repeatedly that for one nation to defeat another by force of arms is not of itself, a sufficient guarantee of victory. In the event of the cultural level of the victors being lower than that of the vanquished, the latter will impose its culture upon the conquerors. Given the low level of culture of the weak Soviet working class, surrounded by a sea of small property owners, the pressures were enormous. They reflected themselves not only in the State, but inevitably in the Party itself, which became the centre of the struggle of conflicting class interests.

Only in the light of all this can we understand Lenin's position in the struggle against bureaucracy, his attitude to Stalin, and the contents of his Suppressed Testament. That document expresses his conviction that the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin is "not a detail, or is a detail which can acquire a decisive significance", in the light of the fact that "Our party is based upon two classes." In a letter written shortly before the Eleventh Party Congress, Lenin explained the significance of conflicts and splits in the leadership in these words:

"If we do not close our eyes to reality we must admit that at the present time the proletarian policy of the Party is not determined by the character of its membership, but by the enormous undivided prestige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the Party. A slight conflict within this group will be enough, if not to destroy this prestige, at all events to weaken the group to such a degree as to rob it of its power to determine policy." (Works, vol. 33, p. 257)

What determined Lenin's bitter struggle against Stalin was not his personal

foibles (“rudeness”) but the role he played in introducing the methods and ideology of alien social classes and strata into the very Party leadership which should have been a bulwark against those things. In the last months of his life, weakened by illness, Lenin turned more and more frequently to Trotsky, for support in his struggle against the bureaucracy and its creature, Stalin. On the question of the monopoly of foreign trade, on the question of Georgia, and finally, in the struggle to oust Stalin from the leadership, Lenin formed a bloc with Trotsky, the only man in the leadership he could trust.

Throughout this entire last period of his life, in numerous articles, speeches, and above all letters, Lenin repeatedly expressed his solidarity with Trotsky. On all the important issues we have mentioned, it was Trotsky whom he singled out to defend his point of view in the leading bodies of the party. Lenin’s appraisal of Trotsky in the Suppressed Testament can only be understood in the light of these facts. Needless to say, all the evidence for the existence of this bloc between Lenin and Trotsky against the Stalin clique was kept under lock and key, for many years. But truth will out. The letters to Trotsky published in Volume 54, of the latest Russian edition of Lenin’s Collected Works, although even now not complete, are irrefutable proof of the bloc that existed between Lenin and Trotsky.

Those very letters, along with other material were long ago published by Trotsky in the West – as early as 1928 in The Real Situation in Russia. Even now the bureaucracy dare not publish all the material in their possession. To stall the growing suspicions of the Communist Party rank-and-file abroad they utilise the services of the Monty Johnstones to sneer at the writings of Lenin published “on Trotsky’s authority”. They will have need of such friends, precisely because their own “authority” is rapidly disappearing in the eyes of honest Communist Party militants everywhere.

Trotsky and the Struggle Against Bureaucracy

“In 1923, as he [Lenin] lay incapacitated on his deathbed … this question was discussed in the Party leadership which, with Trotsky’s participation, drew up a resolution – unanimously adopted on 5th December, 1923 – spotlighting the bureaucratisation of the Party apparatus and the danger arising from it of the detachment of the masses from the Party, and calling for the development of freedom for open party debate and discussion.” (Cogito, p. 22)

Comrade Johnstone poses the question as though the Party leadership unanimously took up Lenin’s position on the question of bureaucracy – in which case it is hard to see what the difference was between Trotsky and Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev, the leading “triumvirate”. Alas! One resolution does not make a struggle against bureaucracy. Stalin, in his day, also frequently denounced the “evils of bureaucracy”. Khruschev, Kosygin and others have sponsored not a few resolutions on this subject. For a Marxist, however, a resolution is a guide to action; but for a cynical bureaucrat, there is nothing better than a “unanimous”, “anti-bureaucratic” proclamation to throw dust in the eyes of the masses.

Monty Johnstone’s appeal to this resolution sounds all the more hollow in the light of what subsequently happened. Exactly how the transition was made from “unanimous, anti-bureaucratic” resolutions to the police-terror, concentration camps and all the other horrors of Stalinist totalitarianism, Johnstone doesn’t explain.

The behaviour of the dominant Kamenev-Zinoviev-Stalin faction on the Central Committee was a strange way of manifesting their loyalty to Lenin. Despite the protests of Krupskaya, Lenin’s “testament” was suppressed. Despite his clear

directive, Stalin was not removed. Lenin's advice about increasing the working class composition of the party and its organisations was cynically used to justify the drafting into the party of large numbers of inexperienced and politically backward elements, who were putty in the hands of the apparatus-men, hand-picked by Stalin's machine.

Simultaneously, a campaign of calumny and falsification was opened up against Trotsky. It was at this time that all the old smears about Trotsky's non-Bolshevik past (which Lenin had written off in his "testament"), about the "permanent revolution", Brest-Litovsk, and the rest, were dragged up by the ruling clique to discredit Trotsky and oust him from the leadership. Zinoviev, when he subsequently broke with Stalin and went over to the Opposition, later admitted that the myth of "Trotskyism" was deliberately invented at this time.

Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin were not, at this stage, consciously aware of the processes which were taking place in the Soviet state and which they were unwittingly abetting. They did not realise in what direction their attacks on Trotsky and "Trotskyism" would lead them. But in attempting to drive a wedge between "Trotskyisim" and Leninism, they set in motion all the machinery of historical falsification and bureaucratic harassment which marked the first decisive step away from the ideas and traditions of October towards the monstrous bureaucratic police state of Stalin and Brezhnev.

Referring to Trotsky's criticism of bureaucracy in The New Course, Monty Johnstone states:

"Although its overall approach is rather negative, there is much that can be seen to have been right in its attacks on the growth and power of the Party apparatus under Stalin's control especially of what we now know of the gross abuses, violating the very essence of Socialist democracy and legality in which this was to result … The New Course … contains trenchant Marxist criticisms of the methods of Stalinist bureaucracy…" (Cogito, p. 22)

The reader will not fail to note, this new and startling “concession” of Comrade Johnstone’s. With all the wisdom of hindsight, and with a truly schoolmasterly air, Monty Johnstone gives Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinist bureaucracy a neat tick – with marks deducted for a “rather negative” overall approach. In the meantime, concealed behind the nebulous formula “violation of Socialist democracy” lie thirty years of bloody reaction against October; the extermination of the entire Old Bolshevik leadership; the liquidation of entire Soviet peoples; the destruction of millions in slave-labour camps, and the destruction of revolutions abroad. These minor “episodes” find no place in Monty Johnstone’s “balanced” analysis. No, far better to write them of as “mistakes” of the past, which still “await analysis”. Monty Johnstone, who shows himself to be such a diligent researcher into the minutiae of the archives of Bolshevism, modestly declines the task of analysing and explaining the bloody crimes of Stalinism over the past three or four decades.

Marxism is, first and foremost, a method of historical analysis, which provides the advanced guard of the working class with the perspectives which are the essential pre-requisites of a successful struggle for power. Marxists do not stumble about blindly in the wake of the historical process, mumbling about “mistakes” and “accidents” or weeping crocodile tears over “tragedies”. The task of a Marxist is to analyse and understand in advance the general tendencies and processes in society. Of course, such an analysis cannot provide a blueprint, accurately predicting every little detail. That is unnecessary. It is sufficient to have understood the general process, in order not to be taken by surprise by history.

Trotsky explained the development of Stalinism in advance as the expression of a petty-bourgeois reaction against October. He explained, as Lenin had done, the tremendous threat of internal degeneration of the Party in which the bureaucracy – that caste of upstart officials who had done well out of the revolution and saw no need to disturb their comfortable office routine by continuing the revolutionary struggles – would act as the transmission belt diffusing the moods of petty-bourgeois reaction and despair into the party.

The New Course is described by Comrade Johnstone as a work containing "trenchant Marxist criticisms" of bureaucracy. The reader may be excused if he feels somewhat perplexed. We know that beautiful butterflies come from ugly and twisted chrysalises. But how did the Trotsky of the "trenchant Marxist criticisms" suddenly emerge from the congenital ultra-left, revolutionary phrasemonger and petty-bourgeois individualist of the previous twenty-one pages? Was it an accident, Comrade Johnstone, that Trotsky and the Left Opposition alone, after Lenin's death could produce such "trenchant Marxist criticism" of the Stalinist bureaucracy? Where was the criticism of the Pollitts and Dutts, the Khruschevs and Kosygins at that time? Is it a fundamental tenet of the Marxist-Leninist outlook that "trenchant Marxist criticism" always comes only after the event?

Even here, Monty Johnstone distorts Trotsky's position by describing it as a criticism of the methods of Stalinist bureaucracy. That was not at all the position of Trotsky. That is precisely the type of "anti-bureaucratism" of Stalin, Kosygin, Brezhnev, Gollan. In The New Course, Trotsky does not deal with mannerisms, but social classes and strata. The leaders of the bureaucracy have always been prepared to rail against "bureaucratic methods", "red tape", etc. But such an approach as Trotsky explains, has nothing in common with Marxism:

"It is unworthy of a Marxist to consider that bureaucratism is only the aggregate of the bad habits of office holders. Bureaucratism is a social phenomenon in that it is a definite system of administration of men and things. Its profound causes lie in the heterogeneity of society, the difference between the daily and the fundamental interests of various groups of the population." (The New Course, p. 41)

Far from the idea of bureaucracy as a "state of mind" or merely a remnant of capitalism which automatically "withers away" with the approach of the higher order of socialism, Trotsky warned that the emergence of a privileged stratum of officials was inevitable under the prevailing conditions of economic and cultural

backwardness in Russia, would create enormous dangers for the revolution itself. Under certain conditions (a split in the party, the combination of the peasantry, petty capitalists and a section of the bureaucracy on a restorationist platform) an actual counter-revolution was possible, as Lenin had repeatedly warned.

Trotsky pointed to the example of the degeneration of the German Social Democracy, which prior to 1914 was regarded as the leading body of the world Marxist movement. This degeneration was explained by Lenin end Trotsky, not by the personal failings or betrayal of individual leaders (although these, too, played a fatal role), but first and foremost by the objective conditions in which the German party had functioned before the War; the absence of great social upheavals and revolutionary struggles, the stagnant parliamentary milieu which created “a generation of bureaucrats, of philistines, of dullards whose political physiognomy was completely revealed in the first hours of the imperialist war.”

In the years following the Civil War, there crystallised a new social stratum of Soviet officials, in part drawn from the old Tsarist bureaucracy, in part from the bourgeois specialists and also from former workers and Communists who had been absorbed into the machinery of state and party and had lost touch with the masses. It was this stratum of conservative bureaucrats, self-satisfied and narrow-minded jacks-in-office, from which Stalin’s faction in the Party derived its support. These were the elements who, after 1921 shouted loudest against the “Permanent Revolution” and “Trotskyism”. By that they understood not Trotsky’s writings of 1905, not the obscure polemics of the past, but the storm and stress of October and the Civil War. The bureaucrat wishes nothing better than peace and quiet to get on with his orderly job of organising those “beneath” him. The slogans advanced by Stalin-Bukharin clique “socialism at a snail’s pace” and “socialism in one country” were precisely what the bureaucracy wanted to hear.

The years of revolution and Civil War had exhausted the masses and partly undermined their morale. The defeat of a series of revolutions internationally weakened the appeal of the Bolshevik ideas among the more backward and

petty-bourgeois strata. From the outset, the Bolshevik-Leninist minority, led by Trotsky, was fighting against the stream. On the other hand, the upstart bureaucracy became more arrogant with every step backwards which was forced upon the revolution in Russia and internationally. Leaning upon the most backward classes and strata of society, the Kulaks, the NEP speculators and small capitalists, the Stalin-Bukharin clique struck blows against the very basis of the October Revolution. Apart from the fostering of capitalist elements inside Russia, the right-wing policies of the leadership led to a series of fresh reversals on an international scale, culminating in the horrific slaughter of the Chinese Revolution in 1927.

It is not possible here to go into the international events of this period. Suffice it to remark that in China, in the period of 1925-7, the Stalin-Bukharin clique carried out the dissolution of the Chinese Communist Party into the Kuomintang. Chiang Kai-Shek, the butcher of the Chinese workers, was hailed as the great leader of the Chinese Revolution. The Kuomintang was enrolled as sympathetic section of the Communist International – with only one vote of the leadership cast against – that of Leon Trotsky. Throughout this period, Trotsky and the Left Opposition struggled against the disastrous policies of the Stalinists: for workers' democracy, five-year plans and collectivisation by example; against unprincipled deals with foreign "democrats" of the Chiang Kai-Shek camp; for continued support for the revolutionary movements of the working class internationally as the only real guarantee for the future of the Soviet state. Of all this, Monty Johnstone has nothing to say, beyond the assertion that Stalin's slanderous attacks on Trotsky "rang a bell" with the workers, and that the Left Opposition was defeated by 724,000 votes to 4,000 "after a nation-wide Party discussion".

The "nation-wide Party discussion" to which Comrade Johnstone refers consisted of such friendly means of persuasion as the sacking of Opposition workers from their jobs, the breaking-up of meetings by Stalinist hooligans, a vicious campaign of lies and slander in the official press, the persecution of Trotsky's friends and supporters which led to the deaths of numbers of prominent Bolsheviks such as Glazman (driven to suicide by blackmail) and Joffe, the famous Soviet diplomat (denied access to necessary medical treatment, committed suicide).

At Party meetings, Oppositionist speakers were subject to the systematic hooliganism of gangs of quasi-fascist thugs organised by the Stalinist apparatus to intimidate the opposition. The French Communist paper, Contre le Courant in the twenties reported the methods whereby the Stalinists conducted their "nation-wide Party discussion":

"The bureaucrats of the Russian party have formed all over the country gangs of whistlers. Every time a party worker belonging to the Opposition is to take the floor, they post around the hall a veritable framework of men armed with police-whistles. With the first words of the Opposition speaker, the whistles begin. The charivari last until the Opposition speaker yields the floor to another." (The Real Situation in Russia, p. 14 footnote)

Johnstone does not find it necessary to look too closely into the conditions under which the final "debate" took place at the 1927 Party Congress, when Stalin's henchmen, who packed the audience, made it impossible for the Opposition to make themselves heard. Contrast this crude gangsterism with the methods adopted by Lenin in relation to political opponents and you see to what an extent, by 1921, Stalinist reaction had stamped out the last vestiges of the traditions of Bolshevism.

Monty Johnstone trots through the history of the Left Opposition with the assured air of a tired old history master rattling off dates and "facts". His composure is not even ruffled by the last "detail" which he just mentions "in passing":

"From his successive places of exile – Turkey, Norway, France, and finally Mexico where he was murdered in 1940 – Trotsky wrote many books, pamphlets and articles and continued to try to build up a left opposition to Stalin."

But hold on, Mr. Schoolmaster, how does the calm, comradely “nation-wide discussion” lead to the exile and murder of the leader of the minority? Trotsky’s murder, and that of hundreds of thousands of Oppositionists in Russia – does that seem like a product of the rational “debate” and political argument you portray? Around this question, the schoolmaster shuffles warily. In a typically “balanced” footnote, Johnstone writes:

“The evidence points strongly to the assassin, Mercader or “Jacson”, who posed as a disillusioned follower of Trotsky, having in fact acted on behalf of Stalin and the GPU. After completing his 20-year jail sentence he left Mexico on a Czechoslovak plane [!] for an undisclosed [!] destination.” (Cogito, p. 94)

Yet another gratuitous “concession” from Comrade Johnstone! Everyone these days is well aware of the bloody record of Stalin’s GPU. Every Communist Party member knows full well that these hired killers were responsible for the murder of Trotsky and countless other revolutionaries in Russia, Spain and elsewhere. Comrade Johnstone magnanimously admits what he cannot deny: and only what he cannot deny! But merely to “admit” a crime is not enough. From a Marxist one expects an explanation.

Monty Johnstone tries to paint a picture of the differences between Stalinism and Trotskyism as “political ones”, “debates”, “arguments”, etc. But the Russian bureaucracy prefers to argue in the eloquent language of bullets, concentration camps, or, in the case of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, tanks, planes and rockets. Lenin “murdered” his opponents in polemics, but not in cold blood. Yet Monty Johnstone, with all the innocence of a new-born babe, pretends that this is all a “mistake”. Trotsky’s murderer is flown away in a Czech plane “to an unknown destination”. The bureaucracy do not forget their old friends, it seems, even after the Twentieth Congress.[1]

Notes

[1] While Ramon Mercader was in jail, his mother, who was a GPU agent in Spain, was awarded the Order of Lenin by Stalin himself for her role in the assassination. She was also presented with the Order of Hero of the Soviet Union for her son. Mercader was released from a Mexican jail in 1960. The “undisclosed destination” was Moscow, via Havana and Prague. It is understood he died of bone cancer in Cuba in 1978.

8. Socialism in One Country

The title of the chapter “The debate on Socialism in one Country” warns the reader in advance what approach Monty Johnstone will take to this question. He commences with a grave warning:

“The great historical controversy on the possibility of building socialism in Russia is still today befogged on both sides by decades-old distortion and misrepresentation. Thus, on the one hand Trotskyists present Stalin as having from 1924, when he first formulated his theory, counterposed Socialism in One Country to the spread of revolution to other countries. On the other side Soviet histories still present Trotsky’s opposition to Stalin’s theory as opposition to Socialist Industrialisation in the Soviet Union and in favour of an export of revolution by force of arms. Both versions are equally false.” (Cogito, p. 74)

Having set up and effortlessly disposed of two straw men, Monty Johnstone can take up his customary cosy position “midway between two extremes”. (Such a comfortable “objectivity” is supposed to be the essence of the Marxist method!) Monty Johnstone now continues his lecture:

“Stalin’s argument was that the spread of revolution to the West was obviously the most desirable thing, but with the delay in this Russia had no alternative but to set itself the aim of building Socialism in the belief that she had all that was necessary to complete this.” (ibid.)

Adding a few appropriate quotes from Stalin, Johnstone then triumphantly concludes:

“The course of revolutions in the world, which today see a growing Socialist camp challenging the old imperialist one, has in no small measure confirmed Stalin’s broad perspective.” (ibid.)

How did Stalin come to work out his “broad perspective” which history so triumphantly vindicated? In February 1924, in his Foundations of Leninism, Stalin summed up Lenin’s views on the building of socialism in these words:

“The overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a proletarian government in one country does not yet guarantee the complete victory of socialism. The main task of socialism – the organisation of socialist production – remains ahead. Can this task be accomplished, can the final victory of socialism in one country be attained, without the joint efforts of the proletariat of several advanced countries? No, this is impossible. To overthrow the bourgeoisie the efforts of one country are sufficient – the history of our revolution bears this out. For the final victory of Socialism, for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of one country, particularly of such a peasant country as Russia, are insufficient. For this the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries are necessary.

“Such, on the whole, are the characteristic features of the Leninist theory of the proletarian revolution.” (Our emphasis)

That these were precisely the “characteristic features of the Leninist theory of proletarian revolution” was nowhere in dispute up to the first part of 1924. They had been repeated time and time again in hundreds of speeches, articles and documents by Lenin since 1905. We have already quoted sufficient examples; they can be multiplied at will. Yet before the end of 1924, Stalin’s book had been revised, and the exact opposite put in its place. By November 1926, Stalin could assert without even blushing:

“The party always took as its starting point the idea that the victory of socialism in that country, and that task can be accomplished with the forces of a single country.”

Lost in admiration for Stalin’s “broad perspectives” which history has “on the whole” confirmed, Monty Johnstone can see only perversity and “underestimation of the internal forces of Russian socialism” in Trotsky’s opposition to the “theory” of socialism in one country. This “dogmatic shibboleth” of Trotsky’s, Monty Johnstone explains:

“Sprang from his theory of ‘permanent revolution’ that we have discussed above. [!] It was in fact basically an expression of his disbelief in the ability of the Soviet Union even to survive as a workers’ state if the revolution did not spread to more advanced countries.” (Cogito, p. 26)

Trotsky in 1906 had written that “without the direct state support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialist dictatorship. Of this there cannot be any doubt … Left to its own resources the working class of Russia will inevitably be crushed by the counter-revolution the moment the peasantry turns its back on it.”

Did this prognosis flow from the theory of permanent revolution alone? Lenin, who, as we have shown, did not at that time have the same position as Trotsky, wrote in 1905:

“The proletariat is already struggling to preserve the democratic conquests for the sake of the socialist revolution. This struggle would be almost hopeless for the Russian proletariat alone, and its defeat would be inevitable … if the

European socialist proletariat did not come to the help of the Russian proletariat … At that stage the liberal bourgeoisie and the well-to-do (plus a part of the middle peasantry) will organise a counter revolution. The Russian proletariat plus the European proletariat will organise the revolution. In these circumstances the Russian proletariat may win a second victory. The cause is then not lost. The second victory will be the socialist revolution in Europe. The European workers will show us 'how it is done'."

Lenin's position, which did not at all "spring from the theory of permanent revolution", is quite clear. But let us cite one other authority which can shed further light on this question. At a conference held in May 1905, the following position was approved:

"Only in one event would social-democracy on its own initiative direct its exertions towards acquiring power and holding it for as long as possible – namely in the event of revolution spreading to the advanced countries of Western Europe, where conditions for the realisation of socialism have already reached a certain ripeness. In this event the restricted historical limits of the Russian revolution can be considerably widened, and the possibility will occur of advancing on the path of socialist transformation."

The conference mentioned was that of the Russian Mensheviks, the tendency that stood furthest of all from the theory of permanent revolution!

Thus the reader can see, irrespective of differences on other questions, every single one of the tendencies of Russian Marxism agreed on one thing: the impossibility of effecting a socialist transformation in Russia without a socialist revolution in the West. On this question, Lenin was more emphatic than Trotsky. Whereas Trotsky in 1905 foresaw the prospect of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia before the workers' revolution in the West, Lenin based his perspective on the socialist revolution in Russia following the revolution in Western Europe.

Monty Johnstone wants to have it all ways. First he spends one half of his work "proving" Lenin's implacable hostility to the theory of permanent revolution, then he spends the other half "proving" that the position which all the tendencies of Russian Marxism accepted without question "sprang from the theory of permanent revolution"! In reality, the attitude of Trotsky, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks towards the impossibility of building socialism in Russia alone (no-one even dared to raise the question until 1924) flowed, not from the theory of the permanent revolution alone, but from the fundamental ideas of Marxism itself.

Marx and Engels explained that the most fundamental factor of capitalist development was the ever-increasing concentration of the means of production, which outstrips the narrow confines of capitalism; on the one hand the private ownership of the means of production, on the other, the national boundaries were transformed from progressive features, encouraging economic growth, to reactionary fetters on the productive forces. Today, those processes, already worked out theoretically in the Communist Manifesto, have become the dominant factor of modern life. On the other hand, capitalism has united the entire globe into a single, interconnected, interdependent whole. The bankruptcy of "national capitalism" is strikingly revealed by the situation where one US company, General Motors, has at its disposal capital in excess of the state budget of Belgium, where the capitalist classes of Western Europe have been forced to cling together in a Common Market, in a desperate effort to survive. Thus, even the bourgeoisie, however inadequately, tries to overcome the limitations of the national market.

Two catastrophic World Wars should have hammered into the thickest skulls the inescapable fact of the conflict between the existence of outmoded national states and the development of the productive forces of the planet, which demands the fullest and freest use of the resources of all countries. The development of gigantic, international corporations, which straddle the Continents, present the workers of different countries with a common enemy. Now, more than ever, does the internationalism of the Communist Manifesto

hold good as the only way forward for mankind and the only programme for a genuinely socialist movement. Socialist internationalism is not based on utopianism or sentimentality but upon the development of capitalist production on a world scale.

Monty Johnstone tries to portray the struggle of the Left Opposition against the Stalinist platform of “Socialism in One Country” as a scholastic debate, of no practical importance. To add a note of solemn authority to this assertion, Johnstone has recourse to a classical piece of Deutscherism: the “debate” on “Socialism in One Country” was like a “dispute about whether it would be possible to cover with a roof a building in which both sides were in favour of starting work, being already in agreement on its shape and the materials to be used.”

It would be hard, even among the heap of theoretical crudities and half-truths which Deutscher provides in abundance, to find a more ignorant characterisation. The differences between the Left Opposition and the Stalinist bureaucracy were not at all about the need to develop the economy of the Soviet Union on socialist lines. In fact, insofar as that question was raised, it was the Opposition that fought for a programme of planning and industrialisation, and the advocates of “Socialism in One Country” who rejected it, up until 1929, preferring to lean for support on the kulaks and “Nepmen”. It was the Opposition which was implacable in its support for the internationalist perspectives of Bolshevism, which also stood firmly in favour of socialist construction in Russia. And this was no accident.

The conflicts which arose in Russia at this time, bore not the slightest resemblance to academic “debates”, but were concerned with the vital issues affecting the life and welfare of the Russian working class, the future of the Russian and international revolution. We have already outlined the processes which were taking place in Russia at the time. We have shown that the idea of “Socialism in Russia alone” expressed the mood of reaction and cynicism of that social stratum which had done well out of the revolution, and which now wished

to apply the brakes to the process set in motion in October, to re-establish "equilibrium". The struggle of the Left Opposition against this "theory" was part and parcel of the struggle of Bolshevism-Leninism for survival in the teeth of petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic reaction against October.

The Stalinist bureaucracy had its roots in the economic and cultural backwardness which the revolution inherited from Tsarism. It drew nourishment from every defeat of the international proletariat, whose victory alone could provide the Soviet state with the resources to overcome the chronic problems of backwardness and carry through the complete transformation of society on socialist lines. The bureaucracy leaned upon the most backward, anti-socialist elements within Russia (the rich peasants and NEP speculators) to strike blows against the proletariat and its vanguard – the Left Opposition. On the other hand, lacking any faith in the abilities of the workers of the West to carry out a revolution, it acted as a brake on the development of the young, immature parties of the Communist International.

The spirit of revolutionary optimism with which the writings of Lenin and Trotsky are saturated was a reflection of their implicit faith in the ability of the working class to change society. The creation of the Third (Communist) International, after the seizure of power in Russia, was the supreme expression of the Bolshevik conception of the revolution, not as a national phenomenon, valid within the borders of the former Tsarist Empire alone, but as an international event. From the very outset, Lenin and the Bolsheviks saw October as the start of the world revolution. Without that perspective, the socialist revolution in Russia would have been an adventure, as the Mensheviks accused it of being. In November 1918, Lenin answered. these critics thus:

"The facts of history have proved to those Russian patriots who will hear of nothing but the immediate interests of their country conceived in the old style, that the transformation of our Russian revolution into a socialist revolution, was not an adventure but a necessity since there was no other choice; Anglo-French and American imperialism. will inevitably strangle the independence and

freedom of Russia unless the world-wide socialist revolution, world-wide Bolshevism, triumphs."

Trotsky in the opinion of Monty Johnstone "over-estimated" the prospects for international socialist revolution and "under-estimated" the possibilities of building socialism in Russia alone. The wisdom of the Deutschers and the Johnstones, essentially the same as the "realism" of reformist politicians, consists in a slavish worship of the established fact: "Lenin and Trotsky predicted a world revolution. That did not happen. Lenin and Trotsky said that without a world revolution, Socialism could not be built in Russia. But that is what happened. Ergo, Bolshevism is a mere fanciful utopia, and Stalinism is justified." Such is the "philosophy" of Deutscherism, shorn of its stylistic niceties. Monty Johnstone adds nothing to the profundities of his mentor, but merely deletes Lenin's name from the syllogism.

The wisdom of the seminar-room stops short of the fundamental question: why was there "no revolution" in Europe? More correctly: why did the series of revolutionary movements in Europe in 1918-1923 not result in the seizure of power by the working class? From Monty Johnstone and Deutscher, we get the "facts": the revolution failed. But precisely for a Marxist the matter cannot end there. If we are interested, not in striking erudite poses, but in actually changing society, we must understand the lessons of history, especially the lessons of great revolutionary movements. That was always the method of Bolshevism, the method of Lenin and Trotsky; for he who fails to learn from past mistakes, is surely doomed to repeat them.

The Revolutionary movement which swept through Europe in 1918-20 was defeated by the treachery of the Social-Democratic leadership. Those same traitors who had sold out in 1914, who were directly responsible for the slaughter of millions of workers in uniform in the war, now recoiled in holy horror from the prospect of "bloody civil war". In one country after another: in Germany, Austria, Britain, France, Italy, the masses moved in a revolutionary direction, only to be headed off by the cowardice and ineptitude of their

“leaders”. Thus, in 1918 in Germany, where a revolution had placed power peacefully in the hands of the workers, the Social Democratic leadership “voluntarily surrendered” it to the bourgeoisie. Their rottenness alone prevented the German workers from realising the fruits of their victory, and coming to the assistance of the beleaguered Soviet Republic.

When Lenin and Trotsky explained that, without the socialist revolution in the West, the Russian workers’ state would inevitably be crushed by reaction or by an imperialist war, this was not, as Johnstone asserts, a manifestation of “defeatism”, but one of extreme revolutionary realism. Marxism itself is a materialist (and therefore profoundly realistic) philosophy, impregnated through and through with a spirit of revolutionary optimism. It is incompatible with the sort of smug, “realistic” philistinism which is the heart and soul of all brands of reformism.

Lenin and Trotsky were always honest and realistic in their appraisal of the prospects of the revolution in Russia and internationally. They understood that the only real guarantee for the future of the Soviet Republic lay in the socialist revolution in the West. They did not lull the working class with sugary illusions about “peaceful co-existence” but mercilessly hammered home the fact that without a socialist transformation on a world scale, new imperialist world wars – a second, a third, a tenth world war – would be inevitable.

The optimism of Lenin and Trotsky on the prospects for the international socialist revolution was fully justified by the magnificent movements of the workers after the First World War. But neither Lenin, Trotsky, nor anyone else can guarantee the success of a revolutionary movement. That depends on a number of factors: the impasse of the capitalist system, the crisis of government, the movement of the working masses, and the disaffection of the middle layers of society. But one of the most decisive factors is the presence of a leadership of the working class worthy of the name. The absence of such a leadership in Western Europe led the workers’ movement to one defeat after another, in the next period paving the way for the victory of fascist reaction and a new and

more terrible World War. Twenty-seven million Russian dead and the destruction of the bulk of industry built up painfully by the heroic sacrifices of the Soviet workers was a harsh confirmation of the realistic prognoses of Lenin and Trotsky.

It is not possible here to go in detail into the international policies of Stalinism. That will be dealt with in a future work. Suffice it to note that the policy of "Socialism in One Country" led to the gradual transformation of Soviet foreign policy from a revolutionary strategy, basing itself upon the working classes of all countries, and attempting, through the Third International, to build up viable Communist Parties as revolutionary leaderships in various countries, to one of manoeuvres and "deals" with bourgeois governments, trade union bureaucrats and colonial "democrats" of the type of Chiang Kai-Shek.

Cause and effect do not stand at eternally fixed antipodes but often change places, the one passing into the other. The rise of the Soviet bureaucracy had as its premise the isolation of the revolution in a backward country. The terrible defeats of the working class in Germany and Bulgaria in 1923, in Britain in 1926, and above all in China in 1927, which followed from the disastrous policies of the Stalin-Bukharin leadership in turn reinforced the position of the bureaucracy and the advocates of "Socialism in One Country", and doomed the Bolshevik-Leninist opposition to defeat. The expulsion of the Left Opposition in 1927 paved the way for a new and more reactionary turn in Russia in the period of Stalinist consolidation. The fate of the Revolution in Russia and internationally, far from being mechanically separated "stages", with the international revolution as a desirable, but not altogether necessary addition (the roof of a house, the fairy on the Christmas tree) were inextricably bound together and mutually conditioned by each other.

Trotsky and the Five Year Plans

Monty Johnstone, by a most peculiar piece of mental gymnastics, attributes to Trotsky a “defeatist” attitude in relation to socialist planning in the Soviet Union. Wherein lay Trotsky’s alleged “defeatism”?

As we have seen, Trotsky and the Left Opposition had struggled for a whole period (1923-27) for the idea of the development of industry through the agency of Five Year Plans, in the teeth of opposition and ridicule from the Stalinists. Following the expulsion of the Left Opposition (1927), the Stalin faction opened up a struggle against the “Right deviation” of Bukharin and, in order to strike a blow against this group, took over, in a caricatured form, certain aspects of the programme of the Left Opposition.

While ignoring the sections referring to the need for workers’ democracy, the Stalinists appropriated the idea of industrialisation and Five Year Plans. The danger of capitalist restoration, which the Left Opposition had warned against, and which the Stalinists repeatedly denied in the previous period, was now used by the Stalin faction as a stick to beat their erstwhile Bukharinite supporters.

In dealing with this manoeuvre of the Stalinists, Monty Johnstone writes:

“It is one of the myths of vulgar Trotskyism that the implementation by Stalin after 1928 of more far-reaching plans [?] than had been put forward by the Opposition in itself proves that the latter was correct. As Maurice Dobb writes: “It does not follow that what may have been practicable in 1928-9 was necessarily practicable at an earlier date when both industry and agriculture were

weaker." However, I would accept the argument that, if the Party had heeded earlier the Opposition's warnings against the dangerous growth in the power of the Kulaks [rich peasants] in the countryside, the process of collectivisation in 1929-30 could have been less violent [!] As against this, though the Trotskyists' economic policies favouring the exploitation of the countryside by the town [!] through a system of price differentials which would keep up the price of industrial products at the expense of agricultural prices (see e.g. The New Economics by Preobrazhensky, the Opposition's chief economist) anticipated theoretically much of the approach to the peasantry that from 1929 Stalin was to apply in practice. [!]" (Cogito, p. 25 footnote)

Of Stalin's "more far-reaching plans", we will say more later. But first, let us deal with the "Red Professor", Maurice Dobb. Is it true to say that it was easier to begin the policy of industrialisation and Five Year Plans in 1928-9 than in the earlier period? Monty Johnstone answers this piece of nonsense himself when he refers to the Opposition's warnings against the Kulak danger.

As against the Stalin-Bukharin policy of concession to the Kulaks and speculators ("Nepmen") at the expense of the poor peasants and industrial workers, the Opposition advocated the taxing of the rich peasants, in order to provide the necessary investment for industrialisation; on the basis of industrialisation alone, the villages could be provided with the means of overcoming the age-old backwardness of Russian agriculture. Only on the basis of the mechanisation of agriculture could collectivisation by example be carried out. To describe this policy of hitting the Kulaks as "the town exploiting the countryside" is merely to repeat the slanders hurled at the Left Opposition by the Stalinists – before they went over to the maniacal policy of collectivisation by force!

When, after the expulsion of the Left Opposition, the Stalinists were forced to turn against the "Rights" – behind whom stood the gathering menace of Kulak reaction – the situation in the countryside was already desperate, while heavy industry, the necessary basis of socialist construction, had stagnated for a whole

period. It is simply a lie to assert that the Stalinist opposition to industrialisation in the period 1923-7 was dictated by their intentions to build up industry and agriculture. On the contrary: their line was one of encouraging those elements in the Soviet economy which were to prove a terrible stumbling block to the development of production in the period of the first five-year plans.

With his customary magnanimity, Monty Johnstone concedes that if the Party had heeded the Opposition's warnings on the Kulak danger "the process of collectivisation in 1929-30 could have been less violent. And just how "violent" was this "process" of collectivisation, Comrade Johnstone? In 1930, the total harvest of grain amounted to 835 million hundredweight. In the next two years it fell to 200 million; this at a time when the level of grain production was only barely sufficient to feed the population. The result spelled famine for millions of workers and peasants. Sugar production in the same period dropped from 109 million poods[1] to 48 million.

Even more terrible were the losses to livestock. The insane tempo of collectivisation, and the vicious methods used, provoked the peasantry to desperate resistance, which plunged the countryside into a new and bloody civil war. The enraged peasants slaughtered their horses and cattle as a protest. The number of horses fell from 34.9 million in 1929 to 15.6 million in 1934, i.e. a loss of 55%. The number of horned cattle fell from 30.7 million to 19.5 million: a loss of 40%. The number of pigs 55%, sheep 66%. Soviet agriculture to the present day has not recovered from the blow dealt by forced collectivisation. But the most gruesome statistic of all is the millions of peasants who perished in this period – from hunger, cold, disease, in running fights with the Red Army or in the slave-labour camps afterwards; the figure of ten million exterminated was not denied by Stalin; four million is the lowest estimate. Such is the little bit of "violence" to which Monty Johnstone coyly refers in his footnote.

Stalin's plan for collectivisation certainly went "much further" than the proposals laid down by the Opposition! Trotsky denounced it as an adventure, given the material backwardness of Russian agriculture. Stalin's "broad

perspectives" spelled disaster to Russian agriculture. But how about industry? Did not the success of Stalin's plans which went "much further" than the perspectives of the Left Opposition, prove how "pessimistic" Trotsky was?

When, after the notorious Moscow Frame-up Trials, Trotsky appeared voluntarily before the Dewey Commission, which went through the charges levelled against him and the Opposition, he answered, among other things, a number of questions relating to the differences with the Stalinists on the question of industrialisation in 1923-9. We quote verbatim from the text of his evidence:

"Goldman: Mr. Trotsky, with reference to the industrialisation of the Soviet Union, what was your attitude prior to your expulsion from the Soviet Union?

"Trotsky: During the period from 1922 until 1929 I fought for the necessity of an accelerated industrialisation. I wrote in the beginning of 1925 a book in which I tried to prove that by planning and direction of industry it was possible to have a yearly coefficient of industrialisation up to twenty. I was denounced at the time as a fantastic man, a super-industrialiser. It was the official name for Trotskyites at that time: 'super-industrialisers'.

"Goldman: What was the name of the book that you wrote?

"Trotsky: Whither Russia, Toward Capitalism or Socialism?

"Goldman: In English, it was published, I am quite sure under the title Wither Russia, Toward Capitalism or Socialism?

“Trotsky: The march of events showed that I was too cautious in my appreciation of the possibility of planned economy – not too courageous. It was my fight between 1922 and 1925, and also the fight for the Five Year Plan. It begins with the year 1923, when the Left Opposition began to fight for the necessity of using the Five Year Plan.

“Goldman: And Stalin at that time called you a ‘super-industrialist’?

“Trotsky: Yes.

“Goldman: He was opposed to the rapid industrialisation of the country.

“Trotsky: Permit me to say that in 1927, when I was Chairman of the Commission at Dnieprostroy for a hydro-electric station, a power station, I insisted in the session of the Central Committee on the necessity of building up this station. Stalin answered, and it is published: ‘For us to build up the Dnieprostroy station is the same as for a peasant to buy a gramophone instead of a cow.’” (The Case of Leon Trotsky, p. 245)

Such was the extent of Stalin’s “broad perspectives” in 1927! At that time, the accusation levelled at the Opposition by the Stalinists was not that they were “pessimistic” but that were “super-industrialisers”! What about the assertion that the plans later implemented by Stalin went “much further” than those of Trotsky?

The years 1925-27 were occupied by the struggle of the Opposition against the economic cowardice of the Stalin-Bukharin leadership. The Stalinists in 1926 first suggested a “plan” which would begin with a coefficient of nine for the first

year, eight for the second, gradually lowering to four – a declining rate of growth! Trotsky, whom the ruling clique branded as “super-industrialist”, described this miserable excuse for a plan as the “sabotage of industry” (not, of course, in a literal sense). Later, the plan was revised to give a coefficient of nine for all five years. Trotsky fought for a coefficient of 18-20. He pointed out that the rate of growth, even under capitalism, had been six! The ruling clique paid no attention to the Opposition and went ahead with their pusillanimous plans. Instead of the miserable nine percent projected by the “broad perspectives” of Stalin-Bukharin, the results of the first year of the five year plan completely bore out the perspective of the Opposition and exposed the complete inadequacy of the coefficients advanced by Stalin and Co. As a result, the following year they plunged into the disastrous adventure of a “five year plan in four years”. In vain did Trotsky warn against this crazy idea, which, threw everything completely off balance. By bureaucratic ukaze the leadership now decreed a coefficient of 30-35%! The wrecking of industry in this period, which was blamed upon the unfortunate victims of the “sabotage trials”, was in reality the result of the adventurism of the Stalinists, whose pursuit of the chimera of “Socialism in One Country” and “Five Year Plan in Four Years” led to the seizing up of the economy and untold hardships for the Soviet working class.

In answer to all the misrepresentations and half-truths of Monty Johnstone concerning Trotsky’s attitude to the Five Year Plans, let us see what Trotsky himself had to say to the Dewey Commission:

“Trotsky: My attitude toward the economic development of the Soviet Union can be characterised as follows: I defend the Soviet economy against the capitalist critics and the Social Democratic reformist critics, and I criticize the bureaucratic methods of the leadership. The deductions were very simple. They were based on the Soviet press itself. We have a certain freedom from the bureaucratic hypnosis. It was absolutely possible to see all of the dangers on the basis of the Soviet press itself.

“Goldman: Can you give us an idea, very generally, of the successes of the

industrialisation in the Soviet Union?

“Trotsky: The successes are very important, and I affirmed it every time. They are due to the abolition of private property and to the possibilities inherent in planned economy. But, they are – I cannot say exactly – but I will say two or three times less than they could be under a regime of Soviet democracy.

“Goldman: So the advances are due, in spite of the bureaucratic control and methods?

“Trotsky: They are due to the possibilities inherent in the socialisation of the productive forces.” (The Case of Leon Trotsky, p. 249)

In pursuit of additional proof of Trotsky’s “pessimism”, Johnstone quotes from The Third International After Lenin:

“To the extent that productivity of labour and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured in the market by the correlation of prices, it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to the Soviet economy.”

These lines were written in 1928, at a time when capitalist market forces were re-asserting themselves in the Soviet economy under the NEP, when the Kulaks (rich peasants) were following the advice of Bukharin: “Get rich!” and when the danger of an actual capitalist restoration, which the Left Opposition warned against, was very real. Commenting on Trotsky’s words without explaining the context, Johnstone writes:

“The monopoly of foreign trade, which Stalin and the Party majority correctly stressed was the means of the Soviet Union shielding itself from such economic subversion, became for Trotsky ‘evidence of the severity and the dangerous character of our dependence.’” (Cogito, p. 267)

Monty Johnstone’s memory is conveniently short. For this same “Stalin and the Party Majority” (i.e. Bukharin) not five years before had stood for the abolition of the state monopoly of foreign trade, and actually passed a resolution in the Central Committee on October 12, 1922 – abrogating the monopoly. The Collected Edition of Lenin’s works in Russian contains a whole series of letters by Lenin in which he appeals to Trotsky to form a bloc with him for the struggle to maintain the monopoly of foreign trade. Thus, on December 13, 1922, Lenin wrote to Trotsky:

“In any event, I would beg you to take upon yourself at the forthcoming Plenum, the defence of our common point of view on the unconditional necessity of the preservation and strengthening of the monopoly of foreign trade.” (Lenin, Collected Works, Russian edition vol. 54, p. 324)

What did Trotsky mean by his statement that “cheap foreign commodities” posed a threat to the Soviet power? In 1917, the proletarian revolution had taken place, not as Marx and Engels had visualised, in an advanced capitalist country, but in a backward, semi-feudal peasant economy. This happened, not because “all the conditions necessary for building socialism” were present in Russia, but because of the absolute inability of the Russian bourgeoisie to solve a single one of the historic tasks before it, on the basis of the capitalist system. Russia was propelled towards the proletarian revolution, not because it was the most advanced, but precisely because it was the most backward of European powers. As Lenin expressed it, capitalism broke at its weakest link.

The victory of the Russian working class in the October Revolution was the prerequisite for beginning the transformation of Russian society. The historic tasks of the bourgeois revolution in Russia could only be carried out under the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is the essential meaning of Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, worked out in 1905. The nationalisation of industry, the state plan, the monopoly of foreign trade were the means whereby the Russian working class pulled Russia out of the slough of age-old backwardness. The historic successes of the five year plans in the Soviet Union are, in themselves, a sufficient justification of the October Revolution. As Trotsky wrote in The Revolution Betrayed:

"Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of Capital, but in an industrial area comprising one-sixth of the earth's surface – not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity."

However, the question of the historical fate of the USSR cannot be exhausted by reeling off an inventory of the success of the five year plans. Lenin, early on, posed the vital question in the striking phrase: "Who shall prevail?" The Soviet Union is not a desert island, but part of a world economic and political system, where the fate of no one country can be isolated from that of the whole. The Soviet Union, despite its enormous industrial successes, still has to measure its strength against that of the imperialist powers of the West.

The capitalist system, while already showing all the symptoms of senile decay on a world scale, started with immeasurable advantages over the Soviet Union. From the outset, the Bolsheviks had to struggle against the prevailing low level of culture of the masses, the lack of a skilled labour force, in a word, of the low productivity of labour. This factor, and not the volume of production in absolute terms, is the real measure of economic success and social advancement. In this decisive field, after 50 years of Soviet power, the Soviet Union still lags far behind the USA.

Official Soviet statistics indicate that the per capita industrial production of the USSR is only 50-60% that of the USA. With a larger working class, with twice the number of technicians and engineers, the actual industrial output of Russia is only 65% that of the USA. The indices of production of heavy industry are the most dramatic. Steel production in the USSR has risen from 4.3 million tons in 1928 to 107 million tons in 1968 – only 18 million tons less than in America (not including 24 million tons imported by the USA). But on the one hand, per capita production of steel in the USA is higher than in the USSR. On the other hand, the harmonious development of human life and culture are not reflected economically by the volume of steel production alone, but more accurately by the development of consumer and high quality technical goods for the mass of the people. In this field, which affects the living standards of the workers, the USSR still lags behind the capitalist countries.

The hordes of speculators, spivs and black-marketeers in Moscow, who make a living by pestering foreign tourists for Western goods and currency, which they sell at a handsome profit to Soviet workers are a clear indication that the threat from “cheap foreign commodities” even today has not disappeared. The draconian sentences (up to and including the death penalty) introduced to combat this speculation has no effect in stamping out a social scourge which has its roots, not in “survivals of capitalism” or the perversity of human nature, but by the objective relations between the Soviet Union and the World Economy, which no haughty bureaucratic “theories” can abolish.

As Marx explained in The German Ideology: “Where want is generalised ‘all the old crap will revive.’” The perennial shortages, high price and low quality of consumer goods (not merely cars and technical goods, but also clothes and foodstuffs) are a basic fact of life for the Soviet working class. That is not to say that luxury goods do not exist. The privileged strata of bureaucrats, factory managers, army officers, etc., possess in abundance the things which a Soviet worker would not dream of: expensive suits, sleek cars, luxury apartments, villas in the countryside, etc. While working-class families in Moscow and other Soviet cities live in conditions of chronic overcrowding, many members of the upper strata own more than one country house (dacha) in addition to their city apartments. The luxurious style of living of the bureaucracy is a constant affront

to the masses of the Soviet people. Thus, after the Second World War, when the Soviet workers and peasants were suffering under conditions of dreadful hardship, the visiting Field-Marshal Montgomery received from the hands of his Soviet “brother” officers the gift of a Soviet Marshal’s fur coat complete with medals, diamonds, etc., costing £5,000!

Under Lenin and Trotsky, the rule of “Partmaximum” meant that a Party member could not receive more than an ordinary worker, even if his skills entitled him to a higher wage. One of the conditions for the inception of a workers’ state as laid down by Lenin in The State and Revolution was the rule that no official was to receive a higher wage than a skilled worker. An early decree of the Revolution fixed a wage differential between workers and specialists of not more than four times, and this Lenin frankly described as a “capitalist differential”, to be reduced systematically. This law applied until 1931 when it was formally abolished by Stalin.

The “Revolution Betrayed”

On pages 32-33, Johnstone writes:

“Trotsky’s dogmatic shibboleths of the impossibility of building socialism in one country led him even now to underestimate how deeply entrenched and resilient the socialist system was in Russia, despite the ravages wrought by Stalin’s purges. Without the interference of a revolution in the West in the event of war, he claimed, ‘the social base of the Soviet Union must be crushed, not only in the case of defeat, but also in the case of victory!’

“Out of touch with Soviet reality, he wrote that ‘the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far towards preparing a bourgeois restoration,’ and, ‘must inevitably in future seek support for itself in property relations,’ entailing ‘its conversion into a new possessing class.’” (Cogito)

Did Trotsky really say this? Let us reproduce in full the passage from The Revolution Betrayed from which Johnstone has carved out his latest “balanced” mini-quotes. On pages 251-2 Trotsky writes:

“As a conscious political force the bureaucracy has betrayed the revolution. But a victorious revolution is fortunately not only a program and a banner, not only political institutions, but also a system of social relations. To betray it is not enough. You have to overthrow it. The October revolution has been betrayed by the ruling stratum, but not yet overthrown. It has a great power of resistance, coinciding with the established proletariat, the consciousness of its best elements, the impasse of world capitalism, and the inevitability of world

revolution.” (our emphasis)

In these words of Trotsky, which Johnstone has evidently “not noticed”, there is not a trace of any under-estimation of the resilience of the basic social gains of the October Revolution, or of any fatalism about the victory of a bourgeois counter-revolution. But let us read on. We reproduce the next section of Trotsky’s work (‘The Question of the Character of the Soviet Union Not Yet Decided by History’) in full, the better to illustrate how Monty Johnstone’s “balance” method of quoting works out in practice. Continuing the above argument, Trotsky writes:

“In order better to understand the character of the present Soviet Union, let us make two different hypotheses about its future. Let us assume first that the Soviet bureaucracy is overthrown by a revolutionary party having all the attributes of the old Bolshevism, enriched moreover by the world experience of the recent period. Such a party would begin with the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the Soviets. It would be able to, and would have to, restore freedom of Soviet parties. Together with the masses, and at their head, it would carry out a ruthless purgation of the state apparatus. It would abolish ranks and decorations, all kinds of privileges, and would limit inequality in the payment of labour to the life necessities of the economy and the state apparatus. It would give the youth free opportunity to think independently, learn, criticise and grow. It would introduce profound changes in the distribution of the national income in correspondence with the interests and will of the worker and peasant masses. But so far as concerns property relations, the new power would not have to resort to revolutionary measures. It would retain and further develop the experiment of planned economy. After the political revolution – that is, the deposing of the bureaucracy – the proletariat would have to introduce in the economy a series of very important reforms, but not another social revolution.

“If – to adopt a second hypothesis – a bourgeois party were to overthrow the ruling Soviet caste, it would find no small number of ready servants among the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and

privileged upper circles in general. A purgation of the state apparatus would, of course, be necessary in this case too. But a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people than a revolutionary party. The chief task of the new power would be to restore private property in the means of production. First of all, it would be necessary to create conditions for the development of strong farmers from the weak collective farms, and for converting the strong collectives into producers' cooperatives of the bourgeois type – into agricultural stock companies. In the sphere of industry, denationalisation would begin with the light industries and those producing food. The planning principle would be converted for the transitional period into a series of compromises between state power and individual "corporations" – potential proprietors, that is, among the Soviet captains of industry, the émigré former proprietors and foreign capitalists. Notwithstanding that, the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far toward preparing a bourgeois restoration the new regime would have to introduce in the matter of forms of property and methods of industry not a reform, but a social revolution.

"Let us assume – to take a third variant – that neither a revolutionary nor a counter-revolutionary parry seizes power. The bureaucracy continues at the head of the state. Even under these conditions social relations will not jell. We cannot count upon the bureaucracy peacefully and voluntarily renouncing itself on behalf of socialist equality. If at the present time, notwithstanding the too obvious inconveniences of such an operation, it has considered it possible to introduce ranks and decorations, it must inevitably in future stages seek supports for itself in property relations. One may argue that the big bureaucrat cares little what are the prevailing forms of property, provided only they guarantee him the necessary income. This argument ignores not only the instability of the bureaucrat's own rights, but also the question of his descendants. The new cult of the family has not fallen out of the clouds. Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one's children. But the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property. It is not enough to be the director of a trust; it is necessary to be a stockholder. The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere would mean its conversion into a new possessing class. On the other hand, the victory of the proletariat over the bureaucracy would insure a revival of the socialist revolution. The third variant consequently brings us back to the two first, with which, in the interests of clarity and simplicity, we set out." (The Revolution Betrayed, pp. 252-254)

This is how Monty Johnstone applies his “Marxist” method. He presents as Trotsky’s viewpoint a number of arguments, taken out of context and artificially strung together, which in the work from which they are taken appear as part of a hypothesis, (one of three!) and are conditioned by a whole series of reservations and explanations which are simply not included anywhere in Monty Johnstone’s “objective” account of Trotsky’s arguments.

“Trotsky predicted an inevitable restoration of capitalism in Russia.” Such is the crux of Monty Johnstone’s “balanced” arguments. But anyone who reads the above passage from The Revolution Betrayed can come to no such conclusion. On the contrary, Trotsky repeatedly emphasises that, whereas the political (anti-bureaucratic) revolution would be faced with relatively easy tasks, any attempt on the party of the bureaucracy to re-introduce capitalist property relationships would meet with stubborn resistance on the part of the Soviet workers and could only succeed as the result of a bloody struggle and civil war.

Far from predicting the imminent capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, The Revolution Betrayed explains that the bureaucracy is obliged to defend the State property relations upon which it rests and from which it derives all its power and privileges. In opposition to those who described the bureaucracy as a ruling class and the Soviet Union as “state capitalist”, Trotsky explained that:

“The Soviet bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order by methods of its own to defend the social conquests. But the very fact of its appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relation between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation. The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so as to speak “belongs” to the bureaucracy. If these as yet wholly new relations should solidify, become the norm and be legalised, whether with or without resistance from the workers, they would, in the long run, lead to a complete liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution. But to speak of that now is at least premature. The

proletariat has not yet said the last word. The bureaucracy has not yet created social supports for its dominion in the form of special types of property. It is compelled to defend state property as the source of its power and its income. In this aspect of its activity it still remains a weapon of proletarian dictatorship." (The Revolution Betrayed, p. 249, our emphasis)

In the face of this, how is it possible for Monty Johnstone to argue that Trotsky claimed that a capitalist restoration was taking place in the Soviet Union? Either he has not bothered to read the book which he purports to analyse, or else he has not understood what he has read. There is a further possibility, but we shall not bother to draw the readers' attention to that. It is sufficient to remark that if members of the Young Communist League wish to understand what Trotsky wrote concerning Russia, they should consult the works of Trotsky himself, and not rely upon the impartiality of their "theoreticians".

"But Trotsky predicted the defeat of the Soviet Union and the victory of capitalist counter-revolution after the war!" chips in Monty Johnstone (Cogito, p. 33)

On page 227 of The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky writes:

"Can we, however, expect that the Soviet Union will come out of the coming war without defeat? To this frankly posed question, we will answer as frankly: If the war should remain only a war, the defeat of the Soviet Union would be inevitable. In a technical, economic, and military sense, imperialism is incomparably more strong. If it is not paralysed by revolution in the West, imperialism will sweep away the regime which issued from the October Revolution." (our emphasis)

Trotsky then proceeds to give a sober analysis of the international class balances,

concluding with the following lines:

"The danger of war and a defeat of the Soviet Union is a reality, but the revolution is also a reality. If the revolution does not prevent war, then war will help the revolution. Second births are commonly easier than the first. In the new war, it will not be necessary to wait a whole two years and a half for the first insurrection. Once it is begun, moreover, the revolution will not this time stop half way. The fate of the Soviet Union will be decided in the long run not on the maps of the general staffs, but on the map of the class struggle. Only the European proletariat, implacably opposing its bourgeoisie and in the same camp with them the "friends" of peace, can protect the Soviet Union from destruction, or from an 'Allied' state in the back. Even a military defeat of the Soviet Union would be only a short episode, in case of a victory of the proletariat in other countries. And on the other hand, no military victory can save the inheritance of the October revolution, if imperialism holds out in the rest of the world." (The Revolution Betrayed, pp. 231-2)

What was the situation which the Soviet Union faced at the end of World War Two? In 1945, Russia had suffered the catastrophic loss of twenty-seven million dead. Her production of steel stood at eight million tons, as compared with 120 million produced by America and 25 million by Britain. Moreover, the armed forces of the Anglo-American imperialist powers remained intact – the war in Europe had resolved itself largely into a Homeric struggle between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The atom bomb was in the hands of the US imperialism, but not yet of Russia.

All the calculations of Anglo-American imperialism had been based upon the advent of such a situation. Their policy was to weaken both German imperialism and the Soviet Union, and to keep their hands free to strangle the Soviet Union should it succeed in defeating Hitler. Why did this plan miscarry? What force stayed the hand of British and American imperialism in 1945? The Red Army, as Trotsky explained in The Revolution Betrayed, was a powerful factor for the defence of the gains of October; but faced with such an overwhelmingly adverse

balance of forces, even the heroism of the Red Army would have been of no avail.

The Soviet Union was saved only by the revolutionary mood of the "Allied" troops and the revolutionary movement in Europe at that time. Any attempt, after the defeat of Hitler, to launch an attack upon the Soviet Union would have provoked mutinies in every army of British and American imperialism. Trotsky had foreseen this, and was shown by events to have been absolutely correct.

The tragedy of the Second World War, for which the workers of the Soviet Union paid a terrible price, was the result of the criminal policies pursued by Stalin and the bureaucracy in the period before the war itself. It was not only that Stalin's manoeuvres on the international plane demoralised the workers of Germany and Spain and led to the victory of Fascism in those countries. The purge trials led to the complete disruption of the Soviet armed forces, and the economy, the undermining of the powers of defence of the USSR, which encouraged the Nazis to attack and resulted in a series of terrible defeats in the early days of the war when millions of Soviet troops surrendered to the Nazis without a fight. It was not a question of military inferiority (the fire-power of the Red Army was superior to that of the Reichswehr) but simply of the decimation of the Red Army leadership by the purges and the myopic arrogance of Stalin and the bureaucracy, who, while hysterically denouncing the "pessimism" of Trotsky, left the Soviet Union in a state of total unpreparedness to the Fascist attack.

A Regime of Proletarian Bonapartism

Monty Johnstone has little enough to say about the causes of Stalinism. Here and there, he drops the odd phrase about “violations of Socialist legality”. But, in spite of all the bombastic phrases about the “Marxist method of critical and self-critical analysis”, there is not an atom of analysis throughout the entire work. Monty Johnstone picks holes in this or that phrase of Trotsky, torn out of context and artificially juxtaposed to other passages from different works. Thus, on the one hand, he berates Trotsky as the “arch-bureaucrat” obsessed with central planning; on the other he attributes to Trotsky a “defeatist” attitude to socialist planning!

What was the basis of Lenin’s opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy? Lenin feared that this stratum might choke the revolution and prepare the way for a capitalist restoration. That did not happen, as Monty Johnstone is eager to point out in relation to Trotsky, who also, initially, foresaw the possibility of a restoration. But, as Lenin explained, history knows all sorts of social transformations; not merely social revolutions and counter-revolutions, but also political revolutions and political counter-revolutions.

To the reader of Monty Johnstone’s article, it would seem inexplicable that, for a whole historical period, “socialism” could express itself through the dictatorship of one man! In reality, the history of bourgeois revolutions furnishes many examples of similar processes. The English bourgeois revolution manifested itself in the Protectorate of Cromwell. The Great French Revolution passed through many phases, and eventually succumbed to the political counter-revolution of Napoleon. The reaction in France represented, not the restoration of feudalism, but a Bonapartist, counter-revolutionary regime which nevertheless rested on the basis of the new property relations established by the Revolution.

It would, of course, be monstrous to suppose that such a dictatorship was compatible with socialism, in any sense of the word as understood by Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky. But what existed in Russia was not “socialism”, but the dictatorship of the proletariat; moreover, the dictatorship was taking place under certain peculiar historical conditions; isolated, in a backward country, subject to the enormous pressures of alien class forces. To imagine that, under these conditions, the dictatorship of the proletariat could not undergo a series of internal transformations, but must always remain in a state of pristine purity is to imagine that it is possible to abstract revolution from the processes taking place in society – the exact opposite to Marxism. The proletariat is not a “sacred cow” that is somehow immune from the pressures of class society.

Lenin, in trying to rid the Soviet apparatus of the menace of bureaucracy, was never under any illusion that the problem could be solved without the help of the international socialist revolution. And in this he was quite correct. The failure of the revolutions in the West did not lead to capitalist counter-revolution, as Lenin and Trotsky had thought possible. But those social processes which were generated by the isolation of the revolution in Russia gave rise to a transformation of the workers’ state into the totalitarian, Bonapartist monster that was the state under Stalin, and which continued, with some of the ugliest warts removed, under Brezhnev and Kosygin. The state lifted itself above the masses, usurping the ruling functions of the class, crushing the last vestiges of workers’ democracy, and sealing its victory by the physical extermination of the entire “Old Bolshevik” leadership.

When one reads the works of Lenin, the most striking thing is the complete absence of the kind of haughty, bragging language of the Stalinists. Lenin was always honest, realistic and truthful in what he wrote about the Soviet state. What they had, at that time, was not “socialism”, not “communism”, but a workers’ state and Lenin was not afraid to add “with bureaucratic distortions”. The difference was that at that time the Soviet state was moving in the direction of socialism. Inequalities existed, but the conscious effort was in the direction of equality, of reducing the power and privileges of officials, of involving the workers in the running of their lives, and the administration of state and industry. And what of today? The only thing which distinguishes the Soviet Union as a

workers' state at all is the nationalised economy and the plan; these are the only gains of the October Revolution that survive. These things by themselves constitute a tremendous step forward, but they even cannot guarantee a successful transition to socialism.

Far from the progress made by the planned economy leading to greater equality and freedom for the working people, the most outrageous corruption and privilege is growing among the upper strata, unhampered by the check of workers' democracy.

The "reforms" from the top, just as under the Tsars, are dictated by fear of revolution from below. They do not touch the basis of the privilege and power of the bureaucracy. And even these crumbs are given hesitantly one minute, only to be taken back the next.

Will the Bureaucracy “wither away”?

“What he [Trotsky] failed to understand … was that it is possible to have for a certain prolonged period, the uneasy and antagonistic coexistence of a Socialist economy and undemocratic, un-Socialist superstructure. Sooner or later the development of the former will tend to [?] push society (albeit tortuously, unevenly, and not at all ‘automatically’) towards reforming the superstructure [?] and bringing it more into keeping [?] with its economic base and the desires of its progressively more developed and educated working class and intelligentsia.” (Cogito, p. 30)

The rise to power of the Stalinist bureaucracy was rooted in the backwardness of Russian society, but it would be a crude mistake, characteristic of the liberal “gradualist” mentality, to assume that the bureaucracy will simply “wither away” as the economy advances. That would have been true in the case of a relatively healthy workers’ state with secondary bureaucratic distortions, such as Russia was in the time of Lenin and Trotsky. But the point that Monty Johnstone seeks to gloss over is the fact that now the Soviet bureaucracy constitutes a special privileged caste, a new aristocracy, which for decades has grown accustomed to lording it over the rest of society. It has a complete monopoly of political power, of the state apparatus, the mass media, the police and the armed forces. Over decades it has shown itself, and is still showing itself, to be capable of the utmost ruthlessness and barbarity in suppressing even the mildest opposition.

The Marxist theory of the state explains how the superstructure of the state arises out of the contradictions between classes in society. But having been established, the state always tends to acquire a certain independence and a movement of its own. It was in this sense that Marx and Lenin spoke of the state power as “standing ‘above’ society and increasingly alienating itself from it.” The measures taken by the Bolsheviks after the Revolution were designed to prevent

the development of such tendencies in the Soviet state apparatus, by subjecting it to the closest checks, supervision, and control by the working class. But once the Stalinist bureaucracy had succeeded (as Johnstone is forced to admit) in raising itself above the rest of society as a special, privileged caste, then the problem of combating bureaucracy took on an entirely different aspect. The vested interests of the bureaucracy, its complete alienation from the working class in whose name it purports to rule, means that a new revolutionary struggle will be necessary – a political revolution – to throw off the yoke of bureaucratic police-rule.

Why is it that the bureaucracy clings so tenaciously to power? Is it some peculiar trait in their mental make-up? Is it a question of "personality"? Not at all. Like all other ruling classes, castes and groups in history, the Soviet bureaucracy uses the state power to defend its privileged position in society. There are no more signs of it wanting to "wither away" than of the capitalist class in the West obligingly handing over its power and loot to the working class.

Monty Johnstone criticises Trotsky for his "carping and ill-conceived" criticism of the Stalin Constitution of 1936, which abolished the Soviet system of elections and replaced it with a Constitution which (on paper) resembled that of a bourgeois democracy, "the weakness of which lay not in its extremely democratic provisions, but in their irrelevance to the real situation in the Soviet Union at that time when Stalin could and did trample them underfoot." (Cogito, p. 32)

Monty Johnstone condemns his arguments out of his own mouth. What sort of a "Constitution" is it which cannot be implemented? And how was it possible for one man to "trample it underfoot"? Was it just Stalin's whim? Or the strength of his "personality"? We have said before, and we repeat: for an idea to obtain mass support and become a force in human affairs, it must express the interests of a class or group. The "theory" of the "personality cult" does not explain anything about Stalin's Russia. One must ask the question: who benefited from the measures taken by Stalin? Which group in society gained from the suppression

of workers' democracy, from the muzzling of the trade unions, from the abolition of the maximum legal wage, from the re-introduction of epaulettes, saluting and batmen in the army? The interests reflected in the anti-working class policies of Stalinism were those of the very bureaucracy against which Lenin had fought – the millions of officials in the state, the Party, the army, the collective farms, the unions.

"But what's this?" cries Monty Johnstone, a caste consisting of millions of people! Your bureaucracy includes "all Party, Young Communist League, State, Cooperative and collective farm leaders, officials, managers, technicians, foremen, and their families drawn from among the most advanced sections of the working class and peasantry and constituting when Stalin died some 22 million people." (Cogito, p. 33)

Monty Johnstone dismisses the argument with a contemptuous wave of the hand, a ruling caste of 22 million people? Whoever heard of such a ridiculous thing? What Johnstone does not explain is that the bureaucracy, as Trotsky pointed out, is not a homogeneous stratum but consists of a series of different layers. Trotsky no more identified the local Party secretary with the Stalins and the Brezhnevs, than we would assert the identity of the small shopkeeper on the street corner with the Rockefellers and the Gettys.

If the top one percent of monopoly capitalists were the only prop of capitalism in the West, the system would collapse in a day. But the bourgeoisie maintains its class rule by means of a whole series of intermediate layers of sub-exploiters and sub-sub-exploiters. It is a similar phenomenon with the Stalinist bureaucracies of the East. The Stalin clique was raised to power on the backs of the millions of officials. That did not prevent Stalin from consigning hundreds of thousands of petty (and not so petty) officials to a grisly end in the concentration camps. As in the Ottoman Empire, and in every despotic state, the local officials are made the scapegoats for the crimes of the bureaucracy as a whole.

In the purges, Stalin drew a line of blood between the October Revolution and the new regime of proletarian Bonapartism. Fearing the ideas of October, with their spirit of working-class democracy and socialist internationalism, he butchered the entire “Old Bolshevik” leadership, and then meted out the same treatment to anyone, including his own supporters, who still retained any links with the old traditions of Bolshevism and October. The Purges, as Trotsky explained, were a one-sided civil war waged by the bureaucracy against Bolshevism. The “leaders” of the Soviet state have nothing in common with October. The Khrushchevs, the Brezhnevs, the Kosygins, are all members of the generation of gangsters and lackeys who climbed to power in the thirties over the bloody corpse of Bolshevism.

At the present time, the inner contradictions of the Soviet Bonapartist regime are more and more glaringly revealed. The movement of revolt among the intellectuals is a harbinger of things to come. Marxists understand that the intelligentsia is not a class as such, but is the social stratum which is most sensitive to the pressures and movements of classes in society. Thus, the movement of the intellectuals in 1956 (the “Crooked Circle” in Poland, the Petofi circle in Hungary) preceded the revolutionary movement of the working class.

It is significant that certain prominent opponents of the regime in the Soviet Union are themselves ex-members of the bureaucracy – like the “retired” General who took up the case of the Crimean Tartars recently. Under pressure from the working class, the bureaucracy, which is ridden with internal contradictions has inevitably split. The lower layers, who are in touch with the working class – the local officials, Communist Party rank and file, lower ranks of the army and police, petty functionaries – will stand with the workers, as they did in Hungary in 1956, when the top bureaucrats were left suspended in mid-air. The only resistance which the Hungarian workers met came from the dregs of the lumpen proletariat organised in the AVO – the hated political police, who met a bloody end at the hands of the proletariat which had suffered terribly from their crimes.

Contrary to the “gradualist” illusions of Monty Johnstone, there is no possibility of the Soviet Union advancing along the road to socialism until the rule of the bureaucrats is overthrown by a new political revolution in Russia and the other deformed workers’ states. The revolution will not be a social revolution aimed at changing existing property relations. The Soviet working class does not want to go back to capitalism, but to move forward on the basis of the achievements of industry and science towards a higher level of workers’ democracy than even in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, and then on to socialism.

The anti-bureaucratic revolution will be a revolution to wrest control of the state, of the trade unions, of industry, out of the hands of the privileged parasites and to re-introduce a healthy, workers’ democracy which would be an example and a beacon for the workers of the rest of the world, and not the grotesque caricature that has done untold damage to the image of Marxism-Leninism in the eyes of the world’s workers. And what we have said of Russia applies equally to the other states where capitalism and landlordism have been overthrown: Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, North Vietnam and Korea, Syria and Burma.

What kind of Socialism?

“If we are going to make a meaningful estimate of Trotsky’s political position, we must avoid arbitrary definitions that take the issues out of their historical context and provoke idle semantic wrangles.” (Cogito, p. 28)

If it is a meaningful estimate of Trotsky’s political position for which we are looking, then we had better look elsewhere. Nowhere in the whole article does Monty Johnstone explain what Trotsky actually wrote in relation to Stalinism and the Soviet Union. He confines himself to isolated fragments of quotations, which are not designed to make Trotsky’s position clear to the reader, but only to make Trotsky look foolish. It would be a simple matter to “do a job” on Marx, Engels or Lenin, using the same “method” – and bourgeois professors frequently have! What Monty Johnstone either cannot or will not understand is that the same phenomenon can manifest itself differently under different conditions, and must be dealt with in an entirely different way. Thus, on the question of the possibility of capitalist restoration in Russia, both Lenin and Trotsky originally regarded this as inevitable, unless the socialist revolution occurred in the West. This was, in fact, possible up to 1927-31. But in his last work, Stalin, Trotsky had already come to the conclusion that, for a number of reasons, the Stalinist regime in Russia might last for decades in its present form.

As far as “arbitrary definitions” are concerned, the reader will note that no sooner does Comrade Johnstone repudiate the very idea than he plunges into just such an arbitrary discussion. Is socialism “a society without classes, commodities, money and state”? Or is it, perhaps the “conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole of society”? Johnstone eventually plumps for “cooperative production on a large scale” – and then triumphantly concludes that “socialism” has been achieved, not only in the Soviet Union, but in thirteen other countries as well!

For the moment, let us not quibble with Comrade Johnstone's "definition". The element of "large scale cooperative production" is undoubtedly a basic feature of socialism. But is that all that socialism is? Even Monty Johnstone would not venture to say so. On page 30 he writes:

"What had been achieved in the thirties in terms of a Socialist economy was of course still only the bare bones of Socialism which required several more decades of peaceful growth before it fully overcame the terrible legacy of Russian backwardness and appeared as a fully developed, prosperous, harmonious and cultured Socialist society." (our emphasis)

In Monty Johnstone's eyes, things were not too good in Stalin's Russia. But then they only had the "bare bones" of socialism, whereas now… well, Comrade Johnstone, what about now? You see Soviet society as a "fully-developed prosperous, harmonious and cultured Socialist society". Very well, but what about all the reports of corruption, mismanagement and nepotism with which the Soviet press abounds? The Soviet leaders claim they are "building Communism" – the highest, most cultured form of human society – yet they need the death penalty for economic offences. Two years ago the Morning Star reported that the head of all the light industry in the Moscow region had been shot for embezzlement. Corruption is also "well-developed" in the Soviet Union. How about the gross inequalities in wages, the existence of 500 rouble millionaires, who are certainly "prosperous". And what could be more "harmonious" than the relationship between the Russian and Czech bureaucracies? Or perhaps this word is meant to designate the state of affairs in a society where all opposition is ruthlessly crushed? As for "cultural" standards – they are well maintained by packing off writers to "corrective" labour camps for the crime of demanding the implementation of the Soviet Constitution!

In 1935 Stalin boasted that the building of socialism in the USSR had been "completed". At that time the death penalty applied to children of twelve! In fact, in the propaganda of the Soviet bureaucrats "socialism" kept on getting

“completed” every few years; so frequently was socialism “completed” that it became a standing joke among Soviet workers, and after Stalin’s death the bureaucracy had to drop it in favour of an even grimmer joke: it was no longer “socialism” that was being built, but “communism” – and that in twenty years!

Of course, the nearer we approach to the end of the twenty-year period, the less we read, in the Communist Party press about the “achievement of Communism” in Russia! Thus on page 30, Johnstone writes:

“Talks of a transition to Communism in the foreseeable future made in the Stalin and Khrushchev era are now generally seen [!] to have contained an enormous amount of bombast and extravagant claims.”

Indeed, Comrade Johnstone. But what were you and the Communist Party readerships writing about this “enormous amount of bombast and extravagant claims” at the time of the 22nd Congress? At that time you were busily engaged in selling this line to your memberships. Now it seems the line has been changed again – with not a word of explanation to the rank and file! The about-face is simply “generally seen” – a formula which merely serves as a fig-leaf to cover the embarrassment of the sorry “theoreticians” who yesterday were full of praise for Khrushchev, the day before yesterday for Stalin, and who are ready in general to change their ideas and principles as a wealthy fop changes his shirts.

The first question which would occur to any thinking member of the Communist Party is: if Socialism has been built in the Soviet Union, if the bourgeoisie has finally been liquidated and the class-struggle overcome, why can they not allow democratic rights to the workers? We think that there is no possibility now of a capitalist restoration in Russia or any of the workers’ states. Then why forbid the expression of opposition points of view, the formation of various workers’ parties? The Soviet Union has nothing to fear if socialism has really been built. Even bourgeois parties could be permitted provided they did not engage in acts of terror or sabotage. You can easily permit the former exploiters to issue

broadsheets calling for a return to the “good old days” of millionaire bosses, Cossack police, and mass illiteracy. They would be treated by the workers as cranks, much as Chesterton was regarded by the English bourgeois “public” when he called for a return to the “Merry England” of feudalism!

Let us pose the question in another way: if it is true that socialism (by which is meant, not merely a nationalised planned economy but the “planned and harmonious production of goods for the satisfaction of human wants”) has been built in Russia, then the hand of reaction, both internal and external, would be paralysed. The image of a really “fully developed, prosperous, harmonious and cultured Soviet society” would exercise a profound effect upon the hearts and minds of the workers of the capitalist countries of the West. The impulse towards a socialist transformation would be irresistible. But how does reality face up to Comrade Johnstone’s “beautiful formula”? Far from the realities of Soviet life inspiring the working class of the West to move towards socialism, it has immeasurably strengthened the hand of the bourgeoisie, who can point to the vile deformities of totalitarianism in Russia and Eastern Europe, and China to frighten the workers of their own countries. “Do you want Communism?” they cry, “Here it is! That is Communism! The Berlin Wall is Communism! Hungary 1956 is Communism! The labour-camps are Communism!” The apologists of the “Communist” parties have endeavoured to prettify the repugnant physiognomy of totalitarianism by sticking the label “socialism” and “communism” all over it. They do not succeed in whitewashing the crimes of the Russian bureaucracy – but only in discrediting the very idea of socialism in the eyes of the workers.

Monty Johnstone approaches the question of whether or not Socialism in One Country has been built, not as a Marxist, but as a casuist and a (bad) formal logician. For a Marxist, the question cannot be settled by the logic of definitions but by the dialectics of history. Monty Johnstone quotes a “definition” from Lenin’s The State and Revolution but he does not explain the analysis contained in that work, of the process whereby a workers’ state moves towards socialism. In The State and Revolution, Lenin lays down the following conditions for a workers’ state, for the dictatorship of the proletariat at its inception:

Free and democratic elections with the right of recall of all officials.

No official to receive a higher wage than a skilled worker.

No standing army or police force, but the armed people.

Gradually, all the administrative tasks to be done in turn by all – every cook should be able to be Prime Minister – "When everyone is a 'bureaucrat' in turn, nobody can be a bureaucrat."

These were the conditions which Lenin laid down, not for "socialism", not for "communism", but for the very first period of a workers' state – the period of the transition from capitalism to socialism. Lenin did not play with definitions of "socialism". The conditions for a workers' state were not sucked out of Lenin's thumb. They constitute the generalisation of the historic experience of the working class. They are the distilled essence of the experience of the Paris Commune of 1870-72, upon which Marx based his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and which Lenin brilliantly analysed in The State and Revolution.

The transition to socialism can only be accomplished by the active and conscious participation of the working class in the running of society, of industry, and of the state. It is not something that is kindly handed down to them by "Communist" mandarins. The whole conception of Marx, of Engels, of Lenin and Trotsky was based upon this fact. Against the confused ideas of the anarchists, Marx argued that the workers need a state to overcome the resistance of the exploiting classes. But that argument of Marx has been distorted by both the reformists and the Stalinists to justify, on the one hand, reformism, on the other, the totalitarian caricature of "socialism" that has allegedly been built in the USSR. But, as Lenin emphasised, the proletariat needs only a state that is "so constituted that it will at once begin to die away and cannot help dying away" or to use the phrase of Marx, a "semi-state".

Under Lenin and Trotsky, the Soviet state was so constructed as to facilitate the

drawing of workers into the tasks of control and accounting, to ensure the uninterrupted progress of the reduction of the "special functions" of officialdom and of the power of the State. Strict limitations were placed upon the salaries, power and privileges of officials in order to prevent the formation of a privileged caste. Because of the prevailing backwardness, and the lack of skilled labour, a wage differential was fixed at not more than four times. In 1919, a People's Commissar (equivalent to a Minister) received the same wage as a workman. Bourgeois specialists received more – but a Party member who was also a specialist got a workman's wage.

In 1931, Stalin abolished the law fixing a maximum legal wage. The average monthly wage of a worker in Russia today is 80-90 roubles (approximately £25, or at the inflated official exchange rate, £40 at the most). But Ministers are paid up to 5,000 roubles per month (£1,250 to £2,000) not counting numerous "perks", like unchecked expense accounts, private sanatoriums, private theatres, villas, bars, etc. When Trotsky built the Red Army, it was based upon the same conceptions of working-class democracy as the state; the old Tsarist traditions of class distinctions in uniform, rank, medals, etc., were abolished. There was no privileged officer caste; the Red Army officers mixed freely and on equal terms with the "ranks". Under Stalin, all the old "bull" was reintroduced; the officer corps reappeared in all its Byzantine magnificence: ranks, epaulettes, saluting and batmen – all the old caste and rank worship and obsequiousness were resurrected in the thirties. Today, in Russia and Eastern Europe, military service represents two years' hard labour, on pittance wages, while the generals and marshals lord it over the ranks. In Bulgaria, for instance, the average monthly wage of a worker is around 100 leva, a soldier receives 150 leva, a junior officer starts at 200 leva. And for a Marxist, the army reveals, in a more acute form, all the contradictions of society.

Of course, no Marxist supposes that society can jump immediately from capitalism to socialism without passing through intermediate stages, especially in a backward country. But the essence of the transitional period is, as Lenin explained, the gradual reduction in the powers of the state, as the majority of the population are drawn into the work of planning the running of society. A Marxist always asks, in relation to a given society, not only what it is, but also in what

direction is if moving? Under Lenin and Trotsky, the Soviet Republic was the dictatorship of the proletariat moving in the direction of socialism. Under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, it is a monstrously deformed workers' state – a state in which the nationalised means of production and the plan remains, but under the control of a totalitarian, one-Party state that is moving, not in the direction of socialism, but on the contrary, towards greater wealth, privileges and power for the parasitic ruling caste.

Monty Johnstone's bland assurances that "socialism" has been built in the Soviet Union constitutes a gross defamation of all the ideas of Marx and Lenin. He takes for good coin all the promises and protestations of the present ruling clique, despite the fact that these have already been debased by the bloody suppression of the Hungarian workers in 1956, by the continued existence of privilege, corruption, and repression inside Russia, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the frame-up of the writers, the continued suppression of the works of Trotsky and the "Old Bolsheviks", the treatment meted out to minorities such as the Ukranians and the Crimean Tartars, the blatant falsification of "official" history, the anti-Semitism, and so on and so forth. The rule of the Soviet bureaucracy has made the word "socialism" stink. And that, Monty Johnstone, is the great crime of Stalinism and the Communist Party leadership internationally.

Nationalist Degeneration of Communist Parties

“A fundamental Marxist criticism of Stalinism, which still remains to be made, will not proceed from Trotsky’s premises, although his writings should be studied for the many valuable lessons – both positive and negative – that they hold for us. Yet even where his occasional insights are at their most brilliant it is within the framework of a fundamentally false model, which prevented him from understanding the laws of development of Soviet society or grasping the (admittedly new and unprecedented) phenomenon of Stalinism in its complexity and many-sidedness. Hence, the unkindness with which history has treated his major predictions that we have quoted in the course of this article.” (Cogito, p. 33)

We have already commented on the way in which, not history, but Monty Johnstone has “treated” Trotsky’s “predictions”. It is a pity that he did not also deal with some of the “predictions” that were made by Stalin, or by the Communist Party leaders in the West over the last few decades. He doesn’t dare quote them. He would not even have to resort to distortion to make them appear completely out of tune with reality!

We hope that we have shown in this article, at least in outline, how Trotsky alone provided a Marxist analysis of the “admittedly new and unprecedented” phenomenon of Stalinism. As to the “brilliant, complex and many-sided analyses” of the Brezhnevs and Kosygins, of the Dutts and Klugmans, we are still searching for those. History has not dealt unkindly with them – because they were never made!

How “unkindly” has history dealt with Trotsky’s most important prognosis? In 1928, in his Critique of the Draft Programme of the Communist International,

Trotsky wrote that the “theory” of “Socialism in One Country”, if it were adopted by the International, would inevitably lead to the nationalist degeneration of the Communist International:

“Revolutionary patriotism can only have a class character. It begins as patriotism to the party organisation, to the trade union, and rises to state patriotism when the proletariat seizes power. Whenever the power is in the hands of the workers, patriotism is a revolutionary duty. But this patriotism must be an inseparable part of revolutionary internationalism. Marxism has always taught the workers that even their struggle for higher wages and shorter hours cannot be successful unless waged as an international struggle. And now it suddenly appears that the ideal of the socialist society may be achieved with the national forces alone. This is a mortal blow to the International.

“The invincible conviction that the fundamental class aim, even more so than the partial objectives, cannot be realised by national means or within national boundaries, constitutes the very heart of revolutionary internationalism. If, however, the ultimate aim is realisable within national boundaries through the efforts of a national proletariat, then the backbone of internationalism has been broken. The theory of the possibility of realising socialism in one country destroys the inner connection between the patriotism of the victorious proletariat and the defeatism of the proletariat of the bourgeois countries. The proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries is still travelling on the road to power. How, and in what manner it marches towards it depends entirely upon whether it considers the task of building the socialist society a national or an international task.

“If it is at all possible to realise socialism in one country then one can believe in that theory not only after but also before the conquest of power. If socialism can be realised within the national boundaries of backward Russia then there is all the more reason to believe that it can be realised in advanced Germany. Tomorrow the leaders of the Communist Party of Germany will undertake to propound this theory. The draft programme empowers them to do so. The day

after tomorrow the French party will have its turn. It will be the beginning of the disintegration of the Comintern along the lines of social-patriotism." (The Third International After Lenin, pp. 71-72, our emphasis)

In these lines, Trotsky brilliantly anticipated the collapse of the Third International, and the nationalist degeneration of the "Communist" Parties, decades in advance. After cynically using the Comintern as the border-guard of the Soviet Union, Stalin contemptuously disbanded it in 1943, as a gesture of "good-will" to his imperialist allies. At the very time when, under the impact of the War, millions of workers in Italy, in Greece, in China, in Eastern Europe, in Britain, were moving in the direction of revolution, the Third International was consigned to the rubbish bin of history.

It is true that, for a number of reasons, Stalinism emerged temporarily strengthened from the Second World War. This was mainly because of the utter bankruptcy of capitalism on a world scale; its powerlessness to intervene against Russia at the end of the War. The revolutionary movement of the working class in Britain, in France, in Italy, plus the mood of the "allied" workers in uniform, paralysed the hand of imperialism.

The inability of imperialism to intervene in Eastern Europe and China, plus the rottenness of capitalism in those areas, led to the rapid overthrow of capitalism and landlordism, which, according to Monty Johnstone, irrefutably demonstrates the incorrectness of Trotsky's accusation of the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism. He does not mention the situation in France, where the Communist Party which enjoyed mass support because of the heroic part played by the membership in the Resistance, entered a coalition government with de Gaulle; or Italy, where Stalin instructed the mass Communist Party to support the "ex-Fascist" Badoglio, at a time when the Northern cities were in the hands of the workers; of Greece, where the 200,000-strong Communist Party-led guerrillas were told to lay down their arms and "await elections", while Grievas' thugs were shooting down Communists in the streets; or Britain, where the Communist Party stood for a "National Front" government – including Churchill!

The collapse of landlordism and capitalism in China and Eastern Europe, and its replacement by nationalised planned economies, was a heavy blow to imperialism on a world scale. In particular, the victory of the Chinese Red Army in 1949 was the second greatest event of the twentieth century, after the October Revolution of 1917. By this event, the multi-millioned peasant masses of China for the first time stepped on to the stage of history.

These developments were welcomed at the time by the British Marxists, who never doubted that they would enable these backward countries to commence the historic task of overcoming the problems left over from the semi-feudal past. But we also understood clearly the contradiction implicit in the type of “revolutions” that occurred in China and Eastern Europe. We understood that they had been carried through by the Stalinist readerships in a Bonapartist fashion. Using the Red Army as a battering ram, the Russian bureaucracy crushed the weak, toothless bourgeoisie and installed their own creatures in its place. Balancing between the classes, they created a state in the image of Moscow. For the rule of workers’ soviets was substituted “national” variants of the Russian model of Stalinism, with all the hideous deformities of one-Party totalitarian police-states. The Eastern European and Chinese “revolutions” began where the Russian Revolution ended; grotesquely deformed regimes of proletarian Bonapartism.

Since the Second World War, we have seen the truth of Trotsky’s analysis of “Socialism in One Country” confirmed in a most striking manner. Instead of the united, “harmonious” socialist bloc to which Monty Johnstone refers, we have the nauseating spectacle, in the first place, of the oppression and plunder of Eastern Europe by the Russian bureaucracy after the War, and then, the wholesale break-up of the Stalinist “bloc” along nationalist lines, starting with the Yugoslav debacle and culminating in the soldiers of Russian and Chinese “socialism” shooting each other down with tanks, planes, and guns in border clashes.

The October Revolution won the ear of the workers of the advanced capitalist

countries by its clarion call of socialist internationalism. The Bolshevik appeal for “a peace without annexations or indemnities” struck a responsive chord in the hearts of the millions of war-weary workers of all belligerent nations, including Germany. The propaganda and fraternisation, conducted on class lines, caused wholesale disaffection in the ranks of the German army, and later in the foreign armies of intervention.

During the Second World War the Russian bureaucracy utilised the most shameless chauvinistic prejudices in its propaganda. Instead of a position of proletarian internationalism, they proclaimed the idea that “the only good German is a dead one”, in a thinly disguised form. And this anti-German element still pervades the propaganda of the Stalinists. The policy of the Russian bureaucracy was: make the German working class pay for the crimes of Hitler, whose victory was made possible by the criminal actions of the German Social Democratic leaders on the one hand and of Stalin and the leaders of the German Communist Party on the other. Ten million Germans were forcibly expelled from Eastern Europe after the War, of which anything up to two million perished in transit under barbarous conditions.

In the years after the War, the Russian bureaucracy plundered Eastern Europe, East Germany had to pay reparations of 16 billion dollars, Romania and Hungary paid out 570 million and 400 million dollars respectively. Not only the “enemy”, but also the other Eastern European countries were systematically stripped of industry, rolling-stock, etc., which were carted off to Russia. Thus, it was the crimes of the Stalinist chauvinists after the War which gave rise artificially to reactionary movements among the expelled population in West Germany, and made the word “Communism” stink among the German working class, which before the War was “the reddest in Europe”.

Before the War, Eastern Europe was notorious for its national divisions. Capitalism and the bourgeois nation state showed themselves impotent to deal peacefully and rationally with the problems arising from this complex patchwork quilt of nationalities and languages. These national divisions have been the bane

of Eastern Europe, a major factor in perpetuating the backwardness of the region, the poverty and misery of the masses, and the brutal oppression of national minorities. If the Stalinists had still retained one iota of the traditions of Bolshevik internationalism, they would have advanced the slogan of a Socialist Federation of Eastern Europe, based upon a common economic plan and linked up to the enormous resources and potential of the USSR.

The “Balkanisation” of Eastern Europe, which was deliberately fostered by the Russian Stalinists after the War has inevitably given rise to the present situation. As foreseen in advance by Trotsky, each national bureaucratic clique is nursing its “own” borders! This at a time when even in the West, the bourgeoisie is faced with the contradiction between the narrow limits of the national market and the imperative demands of the modern economy. Although, of course, on the basis of the private ownership of the means of production, there is no solution to this contradiction.

The results of this national “socialism” are grotesque. At present in Yugoslavia, there are 300,000 unemployed and a further 400,000 who cannot find work in their “socialist” fatherland and are forced to work in the West. Across the border in “socialist” Bulgaria? Where they speak a similar language, there are enterprises working at 45-50% of capacity because of the shortage of semi-skilled operators. (The Economist, Jan 20, 1968) Czechoslovakia and East Germany also suffer from a shortage of labour thanks mainly to the expulsion of the Sudetenland Germans and the mass exodus from the repugnant Stalinist regime of Ulbricht.

The most criminal manifestation of “Socialism in One Country” however, is the Sino-Soviet split. Monty Johnstone points to the victory of the Chinese Red Army in 1949 as “proof” that “Socialism in One Country” is not incompatible with revolutionary socialist internationalism. But the Chinese Stalinists took power in spite of the “fraternal” advice of their Soviet “comrades”. Stalin favoured a partition of China or a coalition government with Chiang Kai-Shek!

It would be interesting to see Monty Johnstone's analysis of the Sino-Soviet dispute, which he does not mention once in his article! What is the explanation of this, Comrade Johnstone? Is it yet another "tragic mistake"? Or is it the result of Mao's "personality cult"? If Stalin's "personality" could hold the entire Russian people in terror, then Mao presumably can also manipulate 700 million Chinese on the strength of his! In reality, Monty Johnstone and the "theoreticians" of Stalinism have no explanation of the Sino-Soviet split. And there can be no explanation, if we accept that both Russia and China are "socialist countries".

The Sino-Soviet split (which was predicted even before Mao's armies came to power by the British Marxists, who based themselves on the prognoses of Trotsky, to which history is alleged to have been so "unkind") has nothing whatever to do with questions of theory and ideology. It is the result of a clash of interests between two rival national bureaucracies. Like two rival gangs in the Chicago of Al Capone, the Russian and Chinese bureaucracies are not prepared to share their power and wealth with anyone, and jealously guard "their territory" against the intrusions of their "fraternal comrades".

From a Marxist point of view the Sino-Soviet dispute is a monstrous occurrence which could never take place between two genuine healthy workers' states. It is a crime which not only does untold damage to the cause of socialism on a world scale, but also stands in fundamental opposition to the interests of the workers and peasants of both Russia and China.

An elementary demand which a genuinely Marxist-Leninist Party would have raised long ago would be: a Socialist Federation of Russia and China. The Russian bureaucracy has been trying to open up the vast expanses of Soviet Asia, which contain untold mineral wealth, the tapping of which could transform the entire way of life of the Soviet people. The main obstacle is the shortage of labour; Soviet workers are reluctant to leave Moscow and Leningrad to go to Central Asia. On the other hand, the vast population of China provides a huge potential labour force for this historic task. Yet, when Chinese cross the

“border”, an arbitrary, meaningless line that cuts across all natural units, they are forcibly expelled by units of the Red Army. At the same time, the Russian bureaucracy is busily negotiating with Japanese Big Business for the opening up of Siberia!

For all their cynical blustering about “proletarian internationalism”, neither the Chinese nor the Russian bureaucracy has advanced the real internationalist programme for the linking-up of the two great economic giants of Russia and China in the interests of both peoples. Instead, we have witnessed the spectacle of the border clashes, the criminal murder of Russian and Chinese workers in uniform, the even more criminal and atrocious propaganda of the Russian and Chinese Stalinists, which is not merely chauvinistic, but has even racialist overtones.

This is the reality of Monty Johnstone’s “thirteen socialist countries”, thirteen totalitarian states, ruled over by thirteen nationalist bureaucracies, who communicate between each other in the fraternal language of machine-guns and rockets!

But Trotsky’s prognosis holds good on yet another question. In the Critique of the Draft Programme of the Comintern, Trotsky points out that the “theory” of “Socialism in One Country” signifies the danger of nationalist degeneration, not only after, but also before the conquest of power. And what is the position with the Parties of the former Communist International today? Everywhere, whether in power, or out of power, the so-called “Communist” parties display all the repulsive features of nationalist degeneration.

For decades, the “leaderships” of the Communist Parties internationally kow-towed, in a truly abject manner, to the dictates of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy. Their policies consisted of a series of contradictory twists and turns, in accordance with the latest manoeuvres of Stalin; now denouncing Social-Democratic workers as “scabs” and “proto-fascists”; now calling for

unification with the bourgeois parties of so-called Liberalism; now opposing the war with Germany on the basis of a peace on Hitler's terms; now adopting the role of the worst strike-breakers "in the national interest" after 1941.

Monty Johnstone, by means of manipulated quotations, tries to "prove" the inconsistency of Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union. But the series of political somersaults performed by his friends, Pollitt, Dutt, Gollan, Campbell, et alia in the past beggar description. Such manoeuvres have nothing in common with Marxism and the Marxist method – they are merely proof of the utterly unprincipled approach of all the Communist Party leaders.

Over the last two decades, the Stalinist "Monolith" has suffered a series of crushing blows: the Yugoslav split, the Polish events and the Hungarian revolution of 1956, and especially the Sino-Soviet split, have all weakened the iron grip of the Russian bureaucracy on the international movement. But what alternative do the "progressive" or "left" Communist Party leaders pose to "the Moscow line"? A return to the ideas of Lenin? Far from it.

The leaders of the Communist Parties everywhere have taken advantage of the situation to assert the right of each national bureaucracy to rule its own roost. The "British Road to Socialism", the "Polish Road to Socialism" – are each manifestations of the narrow, national mentality of the Communist Party leadership and its determination to guard its own leading position in "its own" country, without any "interference" from outside.

The stand taken by a number of foreign Communist Parties over Czechoslovakia was proof of this. They were not going to "carry the can" for the actions of the Russian bureaucracy as they had, with disastrous results, in 1956. The Gollans, the Dutts, the Monty Johnstones, have made no attempt to analyse or explain the invasion of Czechoslovakia. "Is it not enough that the Party leadership dissociated itself from the invasion? What are you complaining about?" Yes, comrades, but what interests a Marxist is not merely pious gestures (the right-

wing Labour leaders also “dissociated themselves” from the invasion of Czechoslovakia!) but an explanation.

The real reason why Brezhnev and Co decided to invade Czechoslovakia is because they feared the effect which even the slightest democratic concessions in Czechoslovakia would have had upon the workers in Russia. Their action was evidence of jittery nerves, not confidence and strength. Yet the Gollans and the Johnstones continue to act as though it were merely a “tragic mistake” on the part of the Soviet bureaucracy!

The “independent” stand of the Communist Party readerships in the West vis-à-vis Moscow is only one side of the coin. On the other side, we have the persistent efforts of the Gollans and the Waldeck-Rochets to ingratiate themselves with “their” national bourgeois “public opinion”[2]. The “new look” of the Stalinists is even more repulsive than the old. It is a caricature of the wretched reformism of the Social Democratic leaders. Thus, the Daily Worker becomes the Morning Star, the Communist Party leaders in all their pronouncements emphasise the non-revolutionary, bourgeois respectability of the Party, its profound patriotism which wants to put the “Great” back in Britain. Evidently, the Communist leaders want to prove they can sing the national anthem louder than the Tory or right-wing Labour leaders! The Union Jack features on every large Communist Party demonstration; after all, it is “our” flag…!

It was significant that the same Communist Party “theoreticians” who criticised the invasion of Czechoslovakia, were also most vocal in support of the disgraceful role played by the leadership of the French Communist Party and CGT during and after the May events last year.

Notes

[1] 1 pood = 36.11 pounds (16.38 kilograms)

[2] John Gollan was the general secretary of the CPGB; Waldeck-Rochets was the general secretary of the French CP at the time.

9. Conclusion

It is easier to write distortions than to answer them. In the present work, we have only managed to deal with the most blatant falsehoods and misrepresentations. But, in fact, the entire method of Monty Johnstone's Cogito article is alien to Marxism. It is not designed to make clear the position of Trotsky, in order to answer it. It falsifies Trotsky's ideas, in order to subject them to surreptitious ridicule. Such an approach has nothing to do with the method of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, who always gave a clear and honest characterisation of the ideas of their opponents, in order to answer them.

But the final bankruptcy of Monty Johnstone's position is revealed by a phrase which slips, almost unnoticed, from his pen:

"A fundamental Marxist criticism of Stalinism," he writes on page 33, "which still remains to be made, will not proceed from Trotsky's premises…"

So there we have it! "The Mountain hath laboured and borne… a mouse!" Sixteen years after the death of Stalin, thirteen years after the Twentieth Congress, and Monty Johnstone's "fundamental criticism of Stalinism" has yet to be made!

Such is the incredible conclusion which Young Communist Leaguers and Communist Party members are expected to take from the "theoreticians" of their movement. Trotsky's "model" is "fundamentally false", but as for our model – well, we are still waiting for that to materialise!

For our part, we invite members of the Communist Party and Young Communist League to draw their own conclusions from the lame excuses of the Monty Johnstones. Put the question to the leadership: Why can't you provide us with an analysis and explanation of Stalinism? Why don't the Soviet leaders produce an analysis? Alas! No reply will be forthcoming. At this very moment, the Soviet "comrades" are busily resurrecting Stalin, and taking back even those meagre concessions that were wrested from their grasp in the fifties. Of course, tomorrow, Brezhnev will be ousted and some "progressive" bureaucrat will again grant concessions, to prevent the workers from moving into struggle. In fact, the bureaucracy will do anything for the workers, anything, except get of their backs!

It is clear that the present discussion was not welcomed by the Communist Party leadership. They tried to put it off as long as possible. But with their new, "independent", "democratic", "respectable" image at stake, they dared not continue to veto it. The events which have rocked World Stalinism in recent years have opened up broad discussions in the ranks of the Communist Parties. Any attempt on the part of the bureaucracy to clamp down on, say, the discussion on Czechoslovakia, would have led to a debacle on the lines of 1956. Their hand has been forced by events.

The sell-out of the movement of the French workers by the Stalinist leadership gave rise to widespread protest and opposition among the Communist Party rank and file, who, unlike the leaders, have not lost their class-consciousness and their desire to change society. Likewise in Britain, the events in France and Czechoslovakia have set the most conscious members of the Young Communist League and Communist Party thinking about the fundamental questions which face the movement. Similar developments are undoubtedly taking place in the Italian and other Communist Parties.

Yesterday, Stalinism was shaken by Hungary and Czechoslovakia, by France and the Sino-Soviet split. What will come tomorrow? The coming period opens up the prospect of new and terrible class battles on an international scale. Under the

cover of the post-war boom, new, fresh forces have been prepared which are untainted by the despair and cynicism of the older generation. The magnificent struggles of the Italian and French working class provide an auger of things to come. The question now is only which will come first – the socialist revolution in the West, or the political revolution in the East?

In the white-heat of great events, the new forces of the revolution will be formed and tested. A large part of these forces, especially in France and Italy, but also in Britain, will come from the Communist Parties and the Young Communist Leagues. It is the duty of all comrades in these organisations to prepare themselves theoretically for the great tasks which face us. Theory is not something which the Party "intellectuals" hand down on a plate. All real Marxists must struggle to train and educate themselves in the basic ideas, methods, and traditions of Marxism. The writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky are not dry, academic, and irrelevant, but contain the living lessons of the experience of the working class movement of all countries over a century and a half. If members of the Communist Party and Young Communist League desire to play a role in building the movement which will change society on socialist lines, they must take this task seriously.

On the basis of events, and the creation of Marxist, of Bolshevik cadres, to participate in the inevitable movements of the working class in Britain and internationally, victory is, in the last analysis, assured in the struggle for a united, harmonious Socialist World Federation. The nightmare of Stalinism and capitalism will become bad memories of the past, and the blossoming of the productive forces of the planet, integrated under a system of democratic control and planning, will enable art, culture and science to rise to unheard of levels. For the first time, Man will be able to draw himself up to his true stature in a world freed from wars, poverty and oppression.

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Appendix A – Trotsky: His Ideas

By Monty Johnstone

[*]

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) to whose heritage half a dozen warring Trotskyist groups lay claim, is a major, though extremely controversial, figure in the history of international socialism, who played a role second only to Lenin in the leadership of the Russian Socialist Revolution of October 1917.

Before 1917

Born into a well-to-do Jewish farmer's family he joined the workers' movement as a young man in South Russia at the end of the last century. Soon embracing Marxism and joining the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, he suffered years of prison and exile for his revolutionary activities. One of the most brilliant orators and writers of this century, he played a leading role in the St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) Soviet (Council) of Workers' Delegates in 1905 in the first Russian Revolution against the tsarist autocracy. After the revolution was crushed, he was sentenced in 1906 to life deportation in Siberia from which he made a dramatic escape. From 1907 till 1914 he lived with his family in Vienna working as correspondent for a Russian liberal daily, whilst editing his own socialist paper for illegal circulation in Russia. When the First World War broke out in 1914 he opposed it as an imperialist struggle by both groups of powers and took part in 1915 in the Zimmerwald Conference of Internationalist Socialists alongside Lenin, although the two men were extremely critical of each other's tactical positions. After the beginning of the war Trotsky had moved to Switzerland and then to France, from which he was deported, making his way to

the USA early in 1917.

(a) Trotsky, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party

When the Trotskyists present Trotsky as the comrade-in-arms of Lenin and the true representative of Leninism after his death, it is important to be aware that in fact Trotsky only worked with Lenin in the Bolshevik Party for six years (1917-23). “He had passed the earlier thirteen or fourteen years,” as his highly sympathetic but also extremely objective biographer Isaac Deutscher notes, “in factional struggle against Lenin, assailing him with ferocious personal insults, as ‘slovenly attorney’, as ‘hideous caricature of Robespierre, malicious and morally repulsive’, as ‘exploiter of Russian backwardness’, ‘demoraliser of the Russian working class’, etc. – insults compared with which Lenin’s rejoinders were restrained, almost mild.”[1]

The basis for this antagonism was Trotsky’s violent opposition to Lenin’s struggle to build up a stable, centralised and disciplined Marxist party. When at the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party a split took place between the Bolsheviks (majority of the Central Committee elected at the Congress), who favoured such a party, and the Mensheviks (minority), who wanted a much looser form of organisation, Trotsky sided with the latter, and belonged to the five-man shadow Central Committee that they formed. Reporting on the congress he said that Lenin had “assumed the role of the party’s disorganiser”, and impelled by a yearning for power, was imposing upon the party a “state of siege” and his “iron fist”.[2] In 1904 he left the Mensheviks and, though continuing to write for their press and even having occasion to act abroad on their behalf, was to remain from then till 1917 formally outside of both parties. (Outlining his life in 1937, by a sleight of hand he changed the date of the emergence of Bolshevism and Menshevism as separate tendencies from 1903 to 1904 in order that he could present himself as never having belonged to the Mensheviks, adding that his line had “coincided in every fundamental way” with Lenin’s.)[3] However, during all this time he never changed his Menshevik views on the party, which he developed with great virulence in 1904 in his

booklet Our Political Tasks, dedicated to his “dear teacher”, the Menshevik leader Axelrod and described by Deutscher as “the most strident bill of impeachment that any socialist had ever drawn up against Lenin”.[4] (When in the 1920s, Trotsky’s works were published in Russia, he did not have it included.)

Lenin had argued, most fully in his What is to be done? (published in 1902), that left to itself the working class would only obtain “trade union consciousness”, i.e. an awareness of the need to struggle for economic demands within the framework of capitalism. Socialist consciousness needed to be brought to the workers from outside and socialist intellectuals who had mastered Marxist theory had a particularly important role to play here. In this pamphlet, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904), Lenin went on to stress the need however for the workers in the Party, who had acquired a sense of discipline and organisation through their industrial experience, to transmit this to the intellectuals who acquired it with much greater difficulty.[5] Completely distorting this complementary role of workers and intellectuals in the Russian workers’ party as Lenin conceived it and disdainfully respecting his notion of party discipline, Trotsky wrote: “According to Lenin’s new philosophy … it suffices for the proletarian to pass through the ‘school of the factory’ to give the intellectuals, who are meanwhile playing the leading role in his party, lessons in political discipline … the Russian proletariat should tomorrow, according to Lenin’s cry, give a rigorous lesson to ‘anarchic individualism’ … What indignation seizes you when you read these disgraceful and dissolutely demagogic lines. That very proletariat that yesterday you were saying was spontaneously drawn to ‘trade unionism’ is today already called upon to give lessons in political discipline. And to whom? To that very intelligentsia to which, according to yesterday’s scheme, belonged the role of bringing to the proletariat from outside its class, its political consciousness … And that is Marxism … Indeed, it is impossible to treat the best ideological heritage of the proletariat with greater cynicism than is done by Lenin.”[6]

Lenin made it perfectly clear that he favoured a democratic party in which the Party congress was sovereign and considered that “the struggle between shades of opinion inside the Party is unavoidable and necessary as long as it does not

lead to anarchy and to a split."[7] Trotsky, however, as so often in his later life, substituted swashbuckling rhetoric and the flights of fancy for a calm examination of his opponent's position.

Lenin's methods, he wrote, would lead to a situation where "the Party organisation (apparatus) 'substitutes' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substitutes itself for the Party organisation, and finally a 'dictator' substitutes himself for the CC…"[8] And he went on to ascribe immorality, suspiciousness and intolerance to Lenin, whom he described as the "leader of the reactionary wing of our Party."[9] Yet this was the very same Lenin of whom he was later to write: "Patience and loyalty towards the opposition were among the most important traits of his leadership."[10]

In the years following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, Trotsky played the role of a "conciliator", trying to smooth over the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, a large part of whom now in practice favoured the liquidation of the underground revolutionary party and its replacement by a legal reformist Labour Party. "Trotsky," wrote Lenin in December 1910, "represents his own personal vacillations and nothing more." After describing his year by year move from one position to another, Lenin went on: "One day Trotsky plagiarises from the ideological stock-in-trade of one faction, the next day he plagiarises from that of another, and therefore declares himself to be standing above both factions."[11] The "standpoint of a matchmaker", constituted "the entire 'ideological basis'" of his conciliationism,[12] remarked Lenin the previous year. "He always manages to 'creep into the cracks' of this or that difference of opinion, and desert one side for the other," he observed on another occasion.[13] When in 1912 the Bolsheviks finally split from the Mensheviks and constituted their own independent party, Trotsky reacted by organising the unprincipled "August Bloc" with the Mensheviks including "liquidators" and a rag-tag and bobtail of other groups of anti-Bolshevik émigrés that quickly fell apart. He was motivated by his unbridled opposition to Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, which united the bulk of politically active socialist workers in Russia itself. "The rotten discord systematically incited by Lenin, the master of this art, the professional exploiter of the backwardness of the Russian labour movement, appears like an absurd nightmare," he wrote to the Menshevik leader Chkheidze

in 1913. “Lenin has made the paper [Pravda] into a tool for his sectarian intrigues and his disruptive tendencies … In a word, the whole of Leninism at this moment is founded on lies and falsehood and contains the seed of its own decay … the gangrene will not be long in setting in among the Leninists.” And he goes on to favour a policy of “destruction of the very basis of Leninism, which is incompatible with the organisation of the workers into a political party but flourishes perfectly on the dung of splits”.[14] (This letter was found after the October Revolution in the archives of the tsarist secret police. When Olminsky, the president of the Commission of Party History, asked him whether it should be published, he replied that this would be “inopportune”, adding paternalistically: “The reader of today will not understand, will not apply the necessary historical correctives and will simply be confused.”[15] This was precisely the Stalinist motivation for the suppression and falsification of historical documents that was in later years to be so roundly and so correctly denounced by Trotsky himself!)

Writing of this period of Trotsky’s life, Isaac Deutscher comments: “The years between 1907 and 1914 form in his life a chapter singularly devoid of political achievement … Trotsky does not claim any practical revolutionary achievement to his credit. In these years, however, Lenin, assisted by his followers, was forging his party, and men like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and, later, Stalin were growing to a stature which enabled them to play leading parts within the party in 1917.”[16] Trotsky, in fact, as we have seen, devoted himself at this time to endeavouring to obstruct the birth and development of this party without which, as he was to recognise later, the socialist revolution could never have succeeded in Russia.

“I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organisational sphere from the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist,” Trotsky was to acknowledge at the end of his life. “I was sick with the disease of conciliationism toward Menshevism and with a distrustful attitude toward Leninist centralism.”[17] The SLL** do not wish to dwell on this. Though they are normally without equals when it comes to looking into people’s political pasts, they have no taste for it when the subject is Trotsky. “What is the point of all those details about the disputes between Lenin and Trotsky in the early 1900s?” they ask Communist

Party members. “On the question of party organisation Trotsky admitted that he was wrong and Lenin was right when he joined the Bolshevik Party in 1917, and ever afterwards he defended Lenin against the people who tried to use Trotsky’s early writings on organisation against Leninism.”[18]

The fact is, however, that although Trotsky was to join the Bolshevik Party in July 1917, under the impetus of the oncoming October Revolution in which he was to play an outstanding role, we find in these fourteen years of Trotsky’s life (between the crucial ages of 24 and 37) the very inability to devote himself in a non-revolutionary period to the overriding task of building up a solid organisation, fitting himself into its ranks, and hence being prepared to submit himself to its collective leadership and discipline that was to reveal itself again after the storms of revolution had died down. In the fiasco of the Fourth International that he was to endeavour to create in the 1930s can be seen the same inability to create a stable revolutionary organisation of his own, whilst hurling abuse from the sidelines at those who have done this, as Lenin noted in the collapse of Trotsky’s August (1912) Bloc.[19] In Trotsky’s personal mud-slinging at Lenin in these early years can be seen what his biographer described as “a characteristic of which he could never quite free himself: he could not separate ideas from men.”[20] It is something that the SLL and The Newsletter have inherited from him. It would be unhistorical indeed if, in evaluating Trotsky, we were to ignore his struggle against Bolshevism during the first fourteen years of its existence – or consider the matter closed by quoting a remark that Lenin is alleged on Trotsky’s authority[21] – to have made in November 1917 (in the midst of the Revolution and after the latter had been in the Party less than four months) to the effect that after he had understood that unity with the Mensheviks was impossible, “there was no better Bolshevik than Trotsky.”[22]

(b) Trotsky’s Theory of ‘Permanent Revolution’

“One ought not to bring up these old disagreements,” between Lenin and Trotsky on the Party, the SLL tell us, “without also mentioning that on the question of the

course and character of the Russian Revolution, Lenin came over to Trotsky's position in April 1917."[23] The Trotskyist ideologist Ernest Mandel, in his recent apologia for Trotsky, writes:

"Nobody will dispute that Trotsky rejected the essence of Lenin's theory of organisation before 1917. In justice to Trotsky it must be added, however, that before 1917 Lenin likewise rejected the necessity of adopting as the strategic goal for the coming Russian Revolution the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The victory of the October Revolution resulted from a historical combination of Lenin's theory and practice of the revolutionary vanguard party, and Trotsky's theory and practice of the permanent revolution."[24] To assess this claim and the theory of "permanent revolution" crucial to Trotskyism we must look first at the old Russia of the Tsars.

Tsarist Russia entered the 20th Century as a backward, oppressive, semi-feudal country consisting predominantly of poor peasants but with a small and militant working class in a relatively small number of industrial centres. Marx and Engels saw a similar situation in Germany in 1848 when they wrote the Communist Manifesto describing the immediate task of the communists there as support for the coming bourgeois revolution against the absolute monarchy and the feudal squirearchy which would clear the way for a direct struggle by the workers against capitalism.[25] In their Address to the League of Communists of March 1850 they saw ahead a revolutionary drama in two acts, the first a bourgeois-democratic revolution that the workers should support and push forward that would bring to power the middle class democrats, the second, a socialist one, that would bring the workers to power. "It is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and advanced towards socialism in all the dominant countries of the world," they wrote. "The workers' battle cry must be: 'The revolution in permanence'."[26]

Lenin and the Bolsheviks basing themselves on this conception of permanent

revolution and applying it to the specific conditions of Russia, saw the Russian people faced “not with the task of making a socialist revolution; but with the task of making a democratic revolution.”[27] Such a bourgeois-democratic revolution, wrote Lenin in 1905 in his Two Tactics of Social Democracy, would “for the first time properly clear the ground for a wide and rapid European, and not Asiatic, development of capitalism,” and “for the first time make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class.”[28] At best it would “bring about a radical redistribution of the land to the advantage of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy including the republic, eliminate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only of village but also of factory life”, as well as improving the living standards of the workers and sparking off revolution in Europe.[29] The bourgeoisie, too inconsistent and too prone to compromise with tsarism, could not be entrusted with leading such a revolution, as the Mensheviks believed. The working class would need to play “the part of leader of the people’s revolution,”[30] in alliance with the mass of the peasantry. It was at present a minority. “It can become the great overwhelming majority,” he wrote, “only if it combines with the mass of semi-proletarians, semi-small proprietors, i.e. with the mass of the petty-bourgeois, urban and rural poor.” Arguing against the view of the Russo-German Social Democrat Parvus that if the revolution against tsarism was to be led by the workers, it should put in power a workers’ government, Lenin went on: “Such a composition of the social basis of the possible and desirable revolutionary-democratic dictatorship will, of course, find its reflection in the composition of the revolutionary government. With such a composition the participation or even the predominance of the most diversified representatives of revolutionary democracy in such a government will be inevitable.”[31] For Lenin and the Bolsheviks the strategic goal of the whole period up to February 1917 was the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and the establishment of such a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, as they called it. Having advanced from autocracy to a republic, the workers should then struggle to pass “from a petty-bourgeois democratic republic to socialism,”[32] the second act of the revolutionary drama. “From the democratic revolution we shall at once, according to the degree of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat,” he wrote, “begin to pass over to the socialist revolution. We stand for continuous (permanent) revolution. We shall not stop half way.”[33]

To Marx’s and Lenin’s concept of permanent revolution Trotsky from 1905

counterposed a theory with the same attractive title, the “lion’s share of which was contributed by Parvus”, as he was to acknowledge himself.[34] Trotsky’s “absurdly ‘left’ theory of ‘permanent revolution”[35] set as the direct objective of revolution in tsarist Russia the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which, he argued, would solve the tasks of both the bourgeois and the socialist revolutions without passing through the intermediate stage of the democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry. Russia could be the first country in the world to establish such a proletarian dictatorship. But, he wrote in 1906 in his Results and Prospects, “without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialist dictatorship. Of this there cannot for one moment be any doubt … Left to its own resources the working class of Russia will inevitably be crushed by the counter-revolution the moment the peasantry turns its back on it.”[36] Although Trotsky viewed the peasantry as a source of potential support in the revolution for the working class who once in power would appear before it as a liberator,[37] he saw the workers “in the early stages of its rule making deep inroads into capitalist property”, which included peasant property. Hence they would come “into hostile collision not only with all the groupings of the bourgeoisie which supported it in the first stage of its revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry with the help of which it came to power.”[38] Here we have the two main aspects of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution: firstly, the conception that “for the backward countries the road to democracy passed through the dictatorship of the proletariat,” (as against Lenin’s conception that the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat passed through democracy), and secondly, the belief that, if it remains isolated, a workers’ state must inevitably succumb to growing internal and external contradictions.[39]

The contrast between the respective approaches of Lenin and of Trotsky emerges very sharply from an article written by Trotsky in October 1915 entitled ‘The Struggle for Power’. “A national bourgeois revolution is impossible in Russia,” he asserted a little over a year before such a revolution was to take place, “because there is no genuinely revolutionary bourgeois democracy. The time for national revolutions has passed – at least for Europe – just as the time for national wars has passed.” The epoch of imperialism in which they were living, he continued, “does not set the bourgeois nation in opposition to the old regime, but sets the proletariat in opposition to the bourgeois nation.” After playing

down the effect of class differentiation among the peasantry, he predicted that “if the proletariat does not tear power out of the hands of the monarchy no-one else will do so” and that this “must transfer power to the class that has led the struggle, i.e. the social-democratic proletariat.”[40]

To this Lenin replied that Trotsky had incorrectly interpreted the interrelation of classes in the impending revolution which was “the principal task of the revolutionary party.” Indicating the increased class struggle and political awakening among the peasantry, Lenin argued that “Trotsky is in fact helping the liberal labour politicians in Russia who by the ‘repudiation’ of the role of the peasantry mean refusal to rouse the peasantry to revolution.” The workers on the other hand were fighting “for the participation of ‘non-proletarian masses of the people’ in freeing bourgeois Russia from military-feudal ‘imperialism’ (tsarism)”. From there they would proceed to the socialist revolution.[41]

The February Revolution of 1917 was not the proletariat fighting the bourgeois nation, as foreseen by Trotsky, but the overthrow of tsarism by a bourgeois revolution carried through by the workers and peasants, that Lenin had foreseen. Power did not pass into the hands of a workers’ government. It was shared between Soviets (Councils) of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, representing the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (the bulk of soldiers were peasants), and the capitalist Provisional Government to which it was voluntarily surrendering its supremacy. In April 1917, when according to the SLL he came over to Trotsky’s position, Lenin wrote: “The Bolshevik slogans and ideas in general have been fully corroborated by history; but concretely, things have turned out differently than could have been anticipated (by anyone); they are more original, more specific, more variegated… ‘The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’ has already become a reality, in a certain form and to a certain extent, in the Russian revolution”[42] And at the end of the same month he was expressing his disagreement with “Trotskyism” whose position he summarised as “No Tsar, but a workers’ government”.[43]

Now that the monarchy was overthrown and “the bourgeois-democratic revolution completed, inasmuch as Russia is now a democratic republic”[44] Lenin mobilised the Bolshevik Party for the second stage of the revolution, which had to transfer power into the hands of the proletariat and the poor strata of the peasantry and take Russia out of the imperialist war. This was achieved with the October Socialist Revolution. Between November 1917 and March 1918 a coalition government of Bolsheviks, representing the workers, and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, representing the poor peasants, ruled the country.

Trotsky was to object however that the traditional, Leninist strategy was invalidated by the fact that “the party and the class understood the democratic dictatorship as a regime which would mercilessly destroy the old state apparatus of the monarchy and completely liquidate manorial landed property. But there was not a trace of this in the Kerensky period.” (Between the February and October Revolutions.)[45] The question of land ownership which he describes as “the basis of the bourgeois revolution” could not be solved under bourgeois rule. “The dictatorship of the proletariat appeared on the scene not after the completion of the agrarian democratic revolution but as the necessary prerequisite for its accomplishment,” he argued.[46] Hence his theory of “permanent revolution” is validated! Q.E.D.

The flaw in Trotsky’s superficially plausible reasoning, here as often elsewhere, is his inflation of secondary factors (though they may be very important ones) to such an extent that they overshadow and obscure the essence of a question. Lenin, on the other hand, with the minimum of flourish, always seized hold of the crux of a matter. “The transfer of state power from one class to another class,” he wrote in April 1917, “is the first, the principal, the basic sign of a revolution, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of the term. To this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic, revolution has been completed.”[47] This remained the essence of the position, even though some of the attributes usually held to belong to such a revolution were absent as they were in the case of other countries’ bourgeois revolutions.[48] Thus the February Revolution, which overthrew tsarism, brought about a democratic republic and made Russia “the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world,”[49] failed to give the land to the peasants. It required the October

Revolution, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, to carry out those bourgeois-democratic tasks which had not been tackled or completed between February and October. But this did not mean that the February Revolution was not a bourgeois-democratic revolution (Trotsky does not attempt to deny this) [50] nor that the October Revolution was not a socialist one. What the latter did was, in Lenin's words, to solve "the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in passing, as a 'by-product' of the main and real proletarian-revolutionary socialist work"[51] If Lenin had believed in "pure" revolutions Trotsky would be right to argue that the experience of 1917 upset the Bolshevik prognoses. In reality, however, Lenin never entertained any such naive view. "In concrete historical circumstances," he wrote in 1905 in his Two Tactics, "the elements of the past become interwoven with those of the future, the two paths get mixed … Surely we all draw the distinction between bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution, we all absolutely insist on the necessity of drawing a strict line between them; but can it be denied that in history certain particular elements of both revolutions become interwoven? … Will not the future socialist revolution in Europe still have to do a great deal that has been left undone in the field of democracy?"[52] Whilst in this period Lenin spoke of the beginning of the struggle for the socialist revolution following a "complete victory" of the democratic revolution with "the achievement of the demands of the present-day peasantry"[53] and undoubtedly did not expect the socialist revolution to follow within eight months of its democratic precursor,[54] he considered the main factor determining the point of transition from one to the other to be "the degree of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat."[55] History proved that he was right to reject Trotsky's strategy which envisaged essentially a leap from tsarism to October skipping February.

When Trotsky and his adherents claim that Lenin discarded the formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry which he had allegedly "acknowledged to be without value"[56] they are right – but only, as we have seen, with respect to Russia where its value as an objective was superseded after the bourgeois revolution of February 1917 had already realised it in its broad essentials. When they want us to believe that Lenin came over to Trotsky's position in April 1917 they are right – but only insofar as the similarity of their positions was brought about by the arrival at a stage that Trotsky had thought "unrealisable"[57] and had envisaged skipping. In his "colossal arrogance"[58] Trotsky appears genuinely to have believed that the Bolshevik

Party had become “de-bolshevised”[59] and, on this basis, he moved towards joining it.

The stage now opening up was to resemble in many striking ways the picture that he had drawn in 1906 of the next Russian Revolution. This far-sightedness was remarkable, but alas – as with his predictions of a one-man Party dictatorship most inappropriately directed at Lenin which were three decades later to be realised… by Stalin – in enabling him to see unusually clearly the features of the mountains lying in the distance, it led him to miss the range ahead that had first to be crossed.

Trotsky however did not stop to analyse his error. He was concerned only to excuse it. Thus in 1924 in the Lessons of October, he argued that the revolutionary strikes – developing in St. Petersburg on the eve of the First World War held out the prospect of a victorious revolution in which “in all probability … the overthrow of the Tsar would have been the signal for the seizure of power by the revolutionary Soviets”, led by the Bolsheviks.[60] What prevented the realisation of such an immediate passage to the dictatorship of the proletariat predicted by Trotsky? The outbreak of the war diverted the movement and created “special circumstances … that threw the conduct of the revolution into the hands of the petty-bourgeois revolutionaries,” due to the emergence of a peasant army of many millions.[61] Yet the war (with the inevitable appearance in a peasant country like Russia of a huge peasant army) was not some unforeseeable historical accident. It was the direct result of imperialist contradictions that had for years been inexorably preparing such a conflict with the resulting peasant, as well as working-class, discontent, without which there would undoubtedly have been no Bolshevik victory in 1917. What is more, as we have already seen, Trotsky continued in the war – in Lenin’s words – to “repeat his ‘original’ theory of 1905 and refuses to stop to think why, for ten whole years, life passed by this beautiful theory.”[62]

Strange to relate, nowhere in any of Lenin’s writings and speeches in the period from April 1917 till his death (they take up twenty-three of the fifty-five

volumes of the new full Russian edition) has it been possible to find so much as a hint that Lenin was aware of his "conversion" to Trotsky's view of "permanent revolution"[63] – and Lenin was never afraid of admitting past mistakes. On the other hand, we do find Trotsky on more than one occasion admitting the converse. Thus the 1927 Platform of the Left Opposition, republished in Britain by the SLL's publishing house who advertise it as, a "landmark in the development of 20th Century Marxism", reproduces the declaration of Trotsky and his associates to the Communist International on 15th December, 1926: "Trotsky has stated to the International that in all those questions of principle upon which he disputed with Lenin, Lenin was right and particularly upon the question of permanent revolution and the peasantry."[64] In a letter to the old "Left Oppositionist" Preobrazhensky, who did not accept his theory, Trotsky admitted: "Up to February, 1917, the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was historically progressive."[65] And even in his Lessons of October he wrote that with his formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry Lenin had been attacking the question of an advance towards the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasants, in a "forcible and thoroughly revolutionary way"[66] – in complete contradiction to his 1909 statement that "the anti-revolutionary features of Bolshevism threaten to become a great danger … in the event the victory of the revolution."[67]

However, we are tempted to conclude that there was an element of "diplomacy" in such statements, which are flatly contradicted by many others, such as the approving prefaces, written after the revolution to pre-revolutionary works, where his theory is re-stated, and most notably by his book, The Permanent Revolution. The latter, written in 1928 in reply to criticism of his theory by Radek, another of his supporters at that time, attempts to provide a full length vindication of his position as against Lenin's, and on occasion, to argue that the difference between the two "had a secondary and subordinate significance."[68]

The significance of this question is not confined to a historical assessment of Trotsky's role in the Russian labour movement up to 1917. We have devoted so much attention to it because his theory of "permanent revolution" developed at that time was, as we shall see, to determine all major Trotskyist policies in the

future whether it be in relation to the building of socialism in the Soviet Union, the whole question of allies for the labour movement involved in the strategy of the Popular Front and the resistance movements against Fascism, or the "general trend of revolutionary development in all backward countries" which, according to the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International drafted by Trotsky in 1938, "can be determined by the formula of the permanent revolution in the sense definitely imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia."[69] However, although this theory, on which there had been no agreement among Trotsky's supporters in Russia, had now ossified into a basic programmatic commitment for all Trotskyist groups at the 1958 Fifth World Congress of the Fourth International, the Report on the Colonial Revolution was to reveal that "some comrades have wondered whether the theory of the permanent revolution … did not reveal certain lacunae, whether it might not be necessary to render it more flexible, and whether there might not have been some errors committed on this subject."[70]

Trotsky in the October Revolution

Arriving back in Russia in March 1917, Trotsky first joined a left-wing group called the Mazhrayontsi with whom, in July, he entered the Bolshevik Party. The next month he was elected as a member of the Party's Central Committee and in September as the President of the Petrograd Soviet in which the Bolsheviks had won a majority. In this period he played an enormously positive role as the Party's spokesman in the Soviets and at mass meetings of workers, soldiers and sailors who were inspired and electrified by his revolutionary oratory. In the floodtide of revolution he rose to his fullest stature, placing his outstanding talents at the service of the Bolshevik Party and transcending for the moment the differences of former years. His role at this time was dramatically conveyed at first hand by John Reed in his epic Ten Days That Shook The World, which Lenin hailed in his introduction as a "truthful and most vivid exposition". A fitting tribute to Trotsky's role was given by Joseph Stalin in Pravda on 6th November 1918. "All practical work in connection with the organisation of the uprising," he wrote, "was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotsky, the President of the Petrograd Soviet. It can be stated with certainty that the Party is indebted primarily and principally to Comrade Trotsky for the rapid

going over of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the efficient manner in which the work of the Military-Revolutionary Committee was organised."[71]

In the years immediately following the victory of the Revolution Trotsky was to play a very active role in the leadership of the Soviet State and of the Russian Communist Party, as well as of the Third (Communist) International founded in 1919. As People's Commissar of War from 1918-1925 he played a key role in building up from out of the ruins of the old tsarist army the heroic Red Army which, with five million men under arms, was to win the civil war against the White Guard generals and to drive out the invading armies of fourteen hostile capitalist countries. The story is stirringly told, bringing out both Trotsky's mistakes (sometimes serious) and his achievements (which must outweigh them) by Isaac Deutscher in the chapter "Arming the Republic" in The Prophet Armed. Speaking of Trotsky to the great Russian writer Maxim Gorky, Lenin was to express his admiration: "Show me another man," he said, thumping the table, "capable of organising in a year an almost exemplary army and moreover of winning the esteem of the military specialists."[72] Yet with all this, Lenin was still to view Trotsky with some reserve. "He isn't one of us," he told Gorky. "With us, but not of us. He is ambitious. There is something of Lassalle in him, something which isn't good."[73]

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918

Although Trotsky had supported Lenin against the opposition of Zinoviev and Kamenev on the need to organise an insurrection in October 1917, he was to find himself at loggerheads with him at the beginning of 1918 on the signing of a peace treaty with Germany. The way he acted on this question highlights both his strengths and weaknesses.

As the first Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet State, which had declared its intention of withdrawing from the world war, Trotsky had gone to

Brest-Litovsk to lead the Soviet delegation negotiating for a peace treaty with representatives of Germany and the Central Powers. He had used the negotiations, carried out in public, as a forum for denouncing all the imperialist powers. His powerful speeches undoubtedly helped to strengthen anti-war feeling in all countries. On the other hand, when faced with the harsh terms demanded by the Germans, overestimation of the immediate revolutionary prospects in the west overshadowed his appreciation of the reality of the situation and led him to refuse to sign the treaty.

Lenin, on the other hand, stressed that the Germans had the whiphand and that the war-weary, ill-equipped and hungry Russian troops could not hold out against their powerful military machine. He therefore urged accepting the German terms, humiliating as he considered them to be, as soon as the Germans presented an ultimatum, warning that the alternative would be that the Germans would advance further into Soviet territory and impose even worse terms.

“Yes, we shall see the world revolution, but for the time being it is a very good fairy-tale, a very beautiful fairy-tale,” he argued. “If the revolution breaks out, everything is saved. Of course! But if it does not turn out as we desire, if it does not achieve victory tomorrow – what then? Then the masses will say to you, you acted like gamblers – you staked everything on a fortunate turn of events that did not take place, you proved unfitted for the situation that actually arose instead of the world revolution, which will inevitably come, but which has not yet reached maturity.”[74]

Trotsky said that signing the treaty was treachery in the full sense of the word.[75] He succeeded at first in obtaining a 9-7 majority in the Party Central Committee for his formula “neither war nor peace”, and predicted that the Germans would be “unable to make an offensive against us.”[76] In fact shortly afterwards the Germans mounted an extremely successful offensive, facing the Soviet government with the necessity of making peace on much worse terms that those originally proposed. Even then he opposed Lenin’s urgent plea to accept the German terms. When it came to the vote in the Central Committee, however,

he and his supporters abstained, giving Lenin a 9-4 majority after the latter had threatened to resign from the government and the Central Committee if “the policy of beautiful revolutionary phrases continued.”[77] At the same time Trotsky resigned from his post as Commissar of Foreign Affairs.[78]

Speaking in March 1918 at the Party Congress that debated the treaty, Lenin showed why Trotsky’s “revolutionary phrase, ‘The Germans cannot attack’, from which the other phrase (‘We can declare the state of war terminated. Neither war nor the signing of peace.’) derived, was such a profound mistake, such a bitter overestimation of events.”[79] What he had predicted had come true. “Instead of the Brest peace we have a much more humiliating peace, and the blame for this rests upon those who refused to accept the former peace,” he said. These people were “assisting German imperialism”, because they had “surrendered wealth valued at millions in guns and shells; and anybody who had seen the state – the incredible state – of the army could have predicted this.”[80]

Trotsky was to admit in a speech in October 1918 that he had been wrong and Lenin had been right over the treaty.[81] However, like his followers, he was concerned in later years to play down the erroneous position he took on this question, referring merely to “some practical and empirical differences with Lenin – no more.”[82] In fact what was involved was Trotsky’s lifelong tendency to allow his appraisal of a concrete situation to be blurred by wishful thinking and infatuation with “the revolutionary phrase”.

Trotsky and Bureaucracy 1920-24

Trotsky is presented by his supporters as the champion of the struggle against bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Since during the last seventeen years of his life Trotsky was tireless in his denunciations of many aspects of Stalin’s bureaucratic regime that the Soviet Communist Party was to unmask in 1956, the Trotskyist claim appears plausible. However, we shall see, the truth is considerably more

complex.

(a) The Trade Union Controversy 1920-21

In the first big Party discussion after the Revolution involving the problem of bureaucracy, Trotsky clashed head on with the majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee. Lenin strongly criticised his policy of “bureaucratically nagging the trade unions”[83] as expressing “the worst in military experience”,[84] and containing “a number of errors that are connected with the very essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”[85]

Since the end of 1919 Trotsky had only been giving a minor part of his time to military affairs. Entering the field of economic reconstruction, he proceeded to apply methods from the military field. He placed great emphasis on the militarisation and compulsion of labour, which, he told the Ninth Party Congress in March 1920, “would reach the highest degree of intensity during the transition from capitalism to socialism”. Speaking to the trade unions, he even went so far as to declare: “The militarisation of labour … is the indispensable basic method for the organisation of our labour force … Is it true that compulsory labour is always unproductive? This is the most wretched and miserable liberal prejudice; chattel slavery too, was productive … compulsory serf labour did not grow out of the feudal lords’ ill-will. It was (in its time) a progressive phenomenon.”[86] In 1920 in addition to his job as Commissar of War, he had taken over the Department of Transport, of vital economic and military importance. Placing the railwaymen and the workers in the railway repair workshops under martial law, he met the objections of the railwaymen’s unions by dismissing its leaders and appointing others more compliant in their place. He did the same with other transport workers’ unions. His efforts brought results: the railways were restored ahead of schedule.

Carried away with this success, he went on to propose that other trade unions

should be likewise “sand-papered” or “shaken up”. He met with the opposition of the Central Committee, which called on the Party to resist “militarised and bureaucratic forms of work”[87] and particularly of Lenin, who criticised “the irregularities and bureaucratic excesses of the Cectran”,[88] the Central Transport Commission that Trotsky headed. Unabashed, Trotsky hit back. He defended his practice of overruling the trade unionists, spoke of “selecting the leading personnel” for them[89] as against a democratic method of election, and flayed those who protested that a new bureaucracy was using tsarist methods. Russia, he argued repeatedly, suffered not from the excess but from the lack of an efficient bureaucracy, to which he favoured giving certain limited privileges. Reporting this, Deutscher comments: “He thus made himself the spokesman of the managerial groups.”[90]

When the Central Committee set up a commission to consider the problems of the trade unions and elected Trotsky to it, he refused to work on it. “This step alone causes Comrade Trotsky’s original mistake to become magnified and later lead to factionalism,” declared Lenin.[91] Organising a faction around the ideas expressed in his pamphlet, The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions (of which Lenin said: “I am astonished at the number of theoretical errors and crying inexactitudes that are concentrated in it”)[92] he launched a debate in the Party culminating at the Tenth Congress in March 1921 in his overwhelming defeat and a decision to ban factions in the Party.[93] Adopting what Lenin called “the administrator’s approach”[94] Trotsky wanted the trade unions to be deprived of their autonomy and incorporated into the state apparatus. Their leaders would represent the state to the workers, rather than vice versa, concentrating on production and labour discipline, for, he argued, they could not logically defend the workers against the workers’ state.[95]

Lenin answered that Trotsky (to whom he ascribed “one-sidedness, infatuation, exaggeration and obstinacy”)[96] was fundamentally mistaken. His error consisted in dealing with “abstractions”,[97] and speaking all the time about “general principle” instead of making a detailed study of the specific situation.[98] (A characteristic failing of Trotsky’s, as we saw over Brest-Litovsk.) In practice, said Lenin, the Soviet state was “a workers’ state with bureaucratic distortions”.[99] For a long time, he argued, the trade unions would need to

engage in “struggle against the bureaucratic distortions of the Soviet apparatus” and for “the protection of the material and spiritual interests of the masses of the toilers by the ways and means that this apparatus cannot employ”.[100]

Lenin’s critical attitude to Trotsky for considering such basic questions from a bureaucratic-administrative rather than a Marxist political point of view was reflected in his final assessment of him in his Testament written in December 1922: “Personally he is perhaps the most capable man in the present Central Committee, but he has too enterprising self-assurance and excessive enthusiasm for the purely administrative side of the work.”[101]

(b) Theses on Industry (1923)

At the 12th Party Congress in April 1923, Trotsky was authorised to present his views on the development of industry as a statement of Party policy.[102] Although there was much in his report that was the product of fruitful collective discussion in the Party leadership, his approach was, once again, that of the administrator who subordinates immediate consideration of workers’ rights and livelihood to longer-term economic targets.[103] (It is at least to Trotsky’s credit that – unlike Stalin later – he was quite open about what he had in mind.) Having proposed the concentration of industry in a small number of large and efficient firms (with the inevitable corollary of loss of jobs by workers in the firms shut down) he argued that the working class would have to shoulder the main burden of industrial construction. “There may be moments,” he said, “when the government pays you no wages, or when it pays you only half your wage and when you, the worker, have to lend (the other half) to the state.”[104]

(c) The 1923-24 Opposition

In the last period of his working life Lenin was desperately concerned about the growth of bureaucracy in the Soviet state apparatus and in the Party. In 1923, as he lay incapacitated on his death bed (he died in January 1924), this question was discussed in the Party leadership which, with Trotsky's participation, drew up a resolution – unanimously adopted on 5th December 1923 – spotlighting the "bureaucratisation of the Party apparatus and the danger arising from it of the detachment of the masses from the Party", and calling for the development of freedom for open Party debate and discussion.[105]

Trotsky provoked a fierce controversy by following this up with a letter and a series of articles that appeared in Pravda and which, together with some new material, he published as a pamphlet entitled The New Course, which stimulated the formation and activity of a Trotskyist Left Opposition in the Party from 1923-24. Although its overall approach is rather negative, there is much which can be seen to have been right in its attacks on the growth and power of the Party apparatus under Stalin's control[106] especially in view of what we now know of the gross abuses, violating the very essence of socialist democracy and legality, in which this was to result. It is therefore understandable that, after the revelations of the Twentieth Congress, some comrades should have been drawn to Trotskyism through this democratic and anti-bureaucratic strain which was to occupy an important place in all Trotsky's subsequent writings on Russia. The New Course, in particular, contains trenchant Marxist criticisms of the methods of Stalinist bureaucracy and a plea for involving young people in the struggle for a "vibrant and active democracy inside the Party"[107] that are of lasting value.

Russian Communists could not, however, so soon forget that the methods of leadership that Trotsky was not criticising so effectively were very much akin to those of which he had been the principal exponent so shortly before. There seemed to be a conflict between his precept when in opposition and his practice when in office. Stalin was therefore able to ring a bell with many people when he referred to Trotsky as "this patriarch of bureaucrats" and accused the Opposition of trying to "wrest the initiative from the Central Committee and get astride the hobby-horse of democracy."[108] Moreover, his approach to economic questions, discussed above was at variance with his plea for greater workers' democracy. As Deutscher correctly notes: "The workers could not be

expected to surrender voluntarily ‘half their wages’ to the state, as Trotsky urged them to do, in order to promote national investment. The state could take ‘half their wages’ only by force; and to do this it had to deprive them of every means of protest and to destroy the last vestiges of a workers’ democracy. The two aspects of the programme which Trotsky expounded in 1923 were to prove incompatible in the near future; and therein lay the fundamental weakness of his position.”[109]

The Building of Socialism in Russia

In 1926-27 Trotsky headed an Opposition in the Soviet Communist Party that fought on the major questions of home and international policy. After a nationwide Party discussion the Opposition was defeated by 724,000 votes to 4,000 with 2,600 abstentions. At the end of 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Party. In 1929 he was deported from the Soviet Union for “anti-Soviet activity” and in 1932 deprived of Soviet citizenship. From his successive places of exile – Turkey, Norway, France and finally, Mexico, where he was murdered in 1940[110] – Trotsky wrote many books, pamphlets and articles and continued to try to build up a Left Opposition to Stalin. At the heart of these disputes lay the question of “socialism in one country”.

(a) The Debate on ‘Socialism in One Country’

The great historical controversy on the possibility of building socialism in Russia is still today befogged on both sides by decades-old distortions and misrepresentations. Thus, on the one side Trotskyists present Stalin as having from 1924, when he first formulated his theory, counterposed “socialism in one country” to the spread of revolution to other countries. On the other side Soviet histories still present Trotsky’s opposition to Stalin’s theory as opposition to socialist industrialisation in the Soviet Union[111] and in favour of an export of revolution by force of arms. Both versions are equally false.

Stalin's argument was that the spread of revolution to the West was obviously the most desirable thing, but that with the delay in this, Russia had no alternative but to set itself the aim of building socialism in the belief that she had all that was necessary to complete this. "The very development of the world revolution," he argued in December 1924, "the very process of separating a number of additional countries from the imperialist states, will be all the quicker and more thoroughgoing in proportion as socialism shall have struck foot in the first victorious country, in proportion as that country shall have transformed itself into the base whence the development of world revolution can proceed, in proportion as that country shall have become the crowbar getting a solid pry and setting the whole structure of imperialism rocking … It is more than likely that, in the course of the development of the world revolution, there will come into existence – side by side with the centres of imperialism in the various capitalist land and with the system of these lands throughout the world – centres of socialism in various Soviet countries,[112] and a system of these centres throughout the world. As the outcome of this development, there will ensue a struggle between the rival systems, and its history will be the history of the world revolution … Those who, forgetting the international character of the October Revolution, declare the victory of the revolution in one country to be simply and solely a national phenomenon, are wrong."[113] The course of revolutions in the world, which today sees a growing socialist camp challenging the old imperialist one, has in no small measure confirmed Stalin's broad perspective.

Trotsky, for his part, never disputed the need to start the job of building up socialism in Russia. Indeed in 1923-24 he called for the introduction of central planning and in 1925-27 advanced proposals for an ambitious programme of industrialisation that earned him the reputation of being a "super-industrialiser".[114] Further, he opposed any export of revolution, declaring in 1924: "We are not inclined to launch into bloody enterprises for the purpose of deciding piecemeal the question of the liberation of all Europe … It will be decided sooner or later. Our task in this period is to strengthen our economy and to raise the level of our culture, holding on until emancipated Europe's workers come to our aid."[115]

Trotsky's rejection of the possibility of completing the building of socialism in Russia without the victory of revolution in the West sprang from his theory of "permanent revolution" that we have discussed above.[116] It was in fact basically an expression of his disbelief in the ability of the Soviet Union even to survive as a workers' state if the revolution did not spread to more advanced countries.

Thus, in The Programme of Peace, published as a programmatic pamphlet in June 1917 and republished with a postscript in 1922 and 1924, he wrote of the socialist revolution in Russia: "Without waiting for the others we begin and we continue the struggle on our own national soil in complete certainty that our initiative will provide the impulse for the struggle in other countries; and if this were not so, then it would be hopeless to think – as is borne out both by historical experience and theoretical considerations – that revolutionary Russia, for example, would be able to maintain herself in the face of conservative Europe, or that socialist Germany could remain isolated in a capitalist world."[117]

In 1937 the theme was essentially the same: "Without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries the workers' government in Russia will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate. More exactly it will first degenerate and then fall. I myself have written about this more than once, beginning in 1905."[118]

Trotsky's underestimation of the internal forces of Russian socialism, was shown particularly in his lack of confidence in the independent development of a socialist economy in the USSR. In his 1922 postscript to his Programme of Peace, he wrote: "So socialism is conceivable only on the basis of the productive forces' growth and blossoming … So long as the bourgeoisie remain in power in other European states we are compelled, in the struggle against economic isolation, to seek agreements with the capitalist world; at the same time it can be stated with certainty that these agreements, in the best case, will help us to heal

this or that economic wound, make this or that step forward, but the genuine rise of socialist economy in Russia will become possible only after the victory of the proletariat in the most important countries of Europe."[119]

In 1927, we find him asserting that the Soviet state was, "directly or indirectly, under the relative control of the world market. Herein lies the root of the question. The rate of development is not an arbitrary one; it is determined by the whole of world development because in the last analysis world industry controls every one of its parts, even if that part is under the proletarian dictatorship and is building up socialist industry."[120] In his criticism of the Draft Programme of the Comintern the next year, he went even further: "To the extent that productivity of labour and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured in the market by the correlation of prices," he wrote, "it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to Soviet economy."[121] The monopoly of foreign trade, which Stalin and the Party majority correctly stressed was the means of the Soviet Union shielding itself from such economic subversion, became for Trotsky "evidence of the severity and the dangerous character of our dependence".[122] In this connection he saw the fate of world economy as a whole as of "decisive significance" as against the subsidiary significance of Russia's socialist construction.[123] And he went on with the utmost defeatism to suggest the possibility of the productivity of labour growing faster in the predominant capitalist countries than in Russia.[124]

The fiasco of this approach was proved by the successes of the Soviet Five-Year Plans. Old revolutionary that he was, Trotsky could scarce forebear to cheer in 1936 when he viewed the "vast scope of industrialisation in the Soviet Union, as against a background of stagnation and decline in almost all of the capitalist world", that emerged from the comparative indices of industrial production.[125] But, alas, when noting that "it is impossible to deny the fact that even now the forces of production in the Soviet Union are developing at a tempo such as no other country in the world has even experienced or is experiencing now,"[126] he was never to admit that this was a direct refutation of his pessimistic predictions of the late twenties, which in their turn contrasted strangely with the super-industrialisation proposals he had advanced at an earlier period. (It is the

latter that are always pointed to by Trotsky's followers nowadays, whilst the former are conveniently forgotten.)

Least of all was he to attempt a Marxist analysis of the source of his errors – a practice that he was always most ready to demand of his political adversaries. Rather was he to draw the strange conclusion that these successes, though signifying that "the technical premise for socialism has made an enormous stride forward", were not leading Soviet society towards socialism but in the direction of "the regeneration of classes, the liquidation of planned economy, and the restoration of capitalist property", in which case, he added, "the state will inevitably become fascist".[127]

Isaac Deutscher has likened the essence of the argument over "socialism in one country" in the twenties to a dispute about whether it would be possible to cover with a roof a building in which both sides were in favour of starting work, being already in agreement on its shape and the materials to be used.[128] Isolated from the undercurrents expressing differences of mood and emphasis that lay behind the heat that it generated, such debate appears highly scholastic. Apparently conscious of this, the New International, the leading American Trotskyist organ of the thirties, praised by Trotsky for its high theoretical level, openly expressed the essence of the Trotskyist position as follows in an editorial dated 30th January 1935: "In the light of the present world situation, the theory of 'socialism in one country', this gospel of the bureaucracy, stands before us in all its nationalistic limitation and its braggart falsity. We refer here, of course, not to the purely abstract possibility or impossibility of building a socialist society within this or another geographic area – such a theme is for scholiasts; we have in mind the vastly more immediate and concrete, living and historical, and not metaphysical question: is it possible for an isolated Soviet state to maintain itself for an indeterminate period of time in an imperialist environment, within the constricting circle of Fascist counter-revolutions? The answer of Marxism is no. The answer of the internal conditions of the USSR is no … Outside of the world revolution there is no salvation."[129]

If we accept the issue posed in this way, history has completely demolished the Trotskyist position. If, however, we define socialism as Ernest Mandel does, as "a society without classes, commodities, money and state",[130] then by the very terms of this definition we are led to a different conclusion. If we are going to make a meaningful estimate of Trotsky's political positions, we must avoid arbitrary definitions that take the issues out of their historical context and provoke idle semantic wrangles. The fact is that Mandel's definition is at variance with the Leninist conception that was generally accepted by the Russian Communist Party. In The State and Revolution, Lenin wrote of socialism as synonymous with Marx's first phase of communism, representing "the conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole of society". Socialism, he went on, "does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of 'bourgeois right' which continues to prevail as long as the products are divided 'according to the amount of work performed' … The Socialist principle 'An equal amount of labour for an equal quantity of products' is … already realised … There is still need for a state … For the complete withering away of the state, complete communism is necessary."[131] This distinction was amplified in The ABC of Communism by Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, which from 1919 had been the basic Party textbook. "In socialist society, which is inevitable as an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism," they wrote, "money is needed for it has a part to play in commodity economy … In socialist society, this commodity economy will to some extent persist."[132] The society without commodities, money and state, which Mandel defines as socialism, carries many of the characteristics that Party tradition identified with the higher stage of communism.[133] It is a red herring for the purposes of this discussion, for it is not what Russian communists understood when they set themselves the goal of creating a socialist economy, which they later claimed to have achieved. They understood socialism essentially as Trotsky had defined it in 1906: "co-operative production on a large scale."[134]

(b) Was Socialism Achieved?

The idea that Russia should set the aim of completing the building of socialism on its own if the international revolution continued to be delayed did represent a departure from the traditional theory of the Bolsheviks, who had never foreseen

their country finding itself as an isolated workers' state long enough for the question to arise. But, although it was never theoretically elaborated by Lenin, in the last period of his working life he was coming more and more in practice to adopt such a perspective.[135] It was perfectly in keeping with Marxist theory that, after his death, the Party should come to terms with the new situation and spell out its confidence that, as Lenin has said, "NEP Russia will be transformed into socialist Russia", since it possessed "all that is necessary and sufficient" for building a socialist society.[136]

What specifically did this perspective mean? Lenin had enumerated five elements constituting the socio-economic forms of existing in Russia after the October Revolution and into the period of the New Economic Policy of free trade in peasant produce, introduced in 1921: (i) patriarchal, largely self-sufficient peasant economy; (ii) small commodity production (including the majority of peasants selling their grain); (iii) private capitalism; (iv) state capitalism; and (v) socialism.[137] The transition to socialism was seen as meaning the transformation of Russia from a backward peasant land into a country with a modern expanding and centrally-planned state industry and collective and state agriculture, going hand-in-hand with big educational and cultural advances. It meant the effective elimination of the first four of Lenin's socio-economic categories, entailing the disappearance of the kulaks (rural bourgeoisie) and the Nepmen (merchant capitalists), and a vast growth of the fifth, comprising state-owned industry and state farms, on the one hand, and collective farms on the other.[138] Defined in these terms, Stalin was able correctly to say after 1935 that Trotsky had been wrong and that "our bourgeoisie has already been liquidated and socialism has already been built in the main. This is what we call the victory of socialism or, to be more exact, the victory of socialist construction in one country."[139]

To leave the problem there would, however, be all too facile. Not only had the collectivisation of agriculture been carried out in an unnecessarily harsh and costly manner that left a bond of distrust between important sections of the peasantry and the proletarian state, but real political power was concentrated not democratically in the hands of the working people but effectively in those of Stalin and a small irresponsible ruling group paternalistically substituting itself

for them. Stalin, whilst leading in an extraordinarily difficult international situation the laying, development and defence of the economic and cultural foundation of socialism – his great historical merit – was riding roughshod over the democratic rights and organs of the Party and the people, carrying through wide-spread arbitrary and brutal persecution in which many of the finest Russian and foreign revolutionaries met a tragic end – his great crime which the Soviet Union and the international communist movement are still paying for dearly today.

Since for Marxists, socialism and democracy have always been considered to go hand in hand, Trotsky was on much stronger ground when, shifting his main line of argument, he came in the second half of the thirties to make as his central objection to the claim that socialism had been built in Russia the police terror and general suppression of political freedom preceded and accompanied by a great increase in the power of the degenerated bureaucratic apparatus in both the Party and the State. What he failed to understand, however, was that it is possible to have for a certain even prolonged period, the uneasy and antagonistic coexistence of a socialist economy and an undemocratic, un-socialist superstructure. Sooner or later the development of the former will tend to push society (albeit tortuously, unevenly and not at all “automatically”) towards reforming the superstructure and bringing it more into keeping with its economic base and with the desires of its progressively more developed and educated working class and intelligentsia. What had been achieved in the thirties in terms of a socialist economy was of course still only the bare bones of socialism which required several more decades of peaceful growth before it fully overcame the terrible legacy of Russian backwardness and appeared as a fully developed, prosperous, harmonious and cultured socialist society. The Soviet Union today though immensely more advanced than in the thirties, has still a long way to go in completing this stage of socialist development as well as shedding many of the bureaucratic practices that still hamper the development of socialist democracy. Talk of a transition to communism in the foreseeable future made in the Stalin and Khrushchev eras are now generally seen to have contained an enormous amount of bombast and extravagant claims. It is fair to say that Trotsky’s writings do provide a useful corrective to this sort of hyperbole, described by Togliatti as “a prevailing tendency in the exaltation of achievements to exaggerate, above all in the propaganda of that time, but also in the general presentation, and to consider all problems solved and the objective

contradictions overcome, together with the difficulties and conflicts which are always inherent in the building up of socialist society, are liable to be very serious and cannot be overcome unless they are recognised openly."[140] Right was also on Trotsky's side when he emphasised the internationalist essence of communism, criticising the elements of narrow nationalism that more and more showed themselves in Stalin's Russia, isolated, encircled and threatened by hostile imperialist powers. But to conclude that the source of all evil in the Soviet Union was the theory of "socialism in one country"[141] and that Trotsky's fundamental objections to this are therefore vindicated, is to substitute windy and exaggerated generalisations for a balanced examination of the question in its different aspects. It is of course much easier to do this as it saves a lot of time, thought and research – but such a method has nothing in common with Marxism.

(c) The Character of the Soviet Union

The Trotskyist movement has experienced violent controversies and splits on the question of the nature of the Soviet Union. Trotsky, however, was firm in his characterisation of it as a "degenerated" and even "counter-revolutionary workers' state" (!)[142] but nonetheless a workers' state which "despite monstrous bureaucratic degeneration … still remains the historical instrument of the working class in so far as it assures the development of economy and culture on the basis of nationalised means of production, and by virtue of this prepares the conditions for a genuine emancipation of the toilers through the liquidation of the bureaucracy and of social inequality."[143]

In keeping with this analysis, he fought all those in his movement who, particularly at the beginning of the war, wanted to reject the traditional Trotskyist slogan of "defence of the Soviet Union". His explanations of how he understood this slogan, however, vary considerably. Thus in 1937, before the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials (where he was in general at pains to appear reasonable), he said: "We will sustain Stalin and his bureaucracy in every effort it makes to defend the new form of property against

imperialist attacks."[144] However, in September 1939, he wrote: "In the USSR the overthrow of the bureaucracy is indispensable for the preservation of state property. Only in this sense do we stand for the defence of the USSR … Our defence of the USSR is carried on under the slogan 'For Socialism! For World Revolution! Against Stalin!'"[145]

(d) The Revolution Betrayed

The Revolution Betrayed, written by Trotsky in 1936 and still the basic Trotskyist textbook on the Soviet Union, shows both the strengths and weaknesses of his position at this time. Analysing the development of the Soviet Union up to the mid-thirties, he scored not a few bull's-eyes in exposing such negative features of Stalinist Russia as the growth of bureaucracy, repression and gross inequality, the official hypocrisy and the stifling of artistic freedom. However, many of his criticisms are carping and ill-conceived, as for instance in his attack on the terms of the 1936 Constitution, the weakness of which lay not in its extremely democratic provisions, but their irrelevance to the real situation in the Soviet Union at that time when Stalin could and did trample them underfoot. For instance, he described the introduction of the universal, equal and direct vote (replacing the indirect system, the weighting of representation in favour of the working class as against the peasantry and the denial of the vote to members of former exploiting classes, priests, etc.) as "juridically liquidating the dictatorship of the proletariat".[146] The constitution as a whole, he asserted, represents "an immense step back from socialist to bourgeois principles", and "creates the political premises for the birth of a new possessing class".[147]

Trotsky's dogmatic shibboleth of the impossibility of building "socialism in one country" led him even now to underestimate how deeply entrenched and resilient the socialist system was in Russia, despite the ravages wrought by Stalin's purges. Without the interference of a revolution in the West in the event of war, he claimed, "the social base of the Soviet Union must be crushed, not only in the case of defeat, but also in the case of victory!"[148]

Out of touch with Soviet reality, he wrote that “the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far towards preparing a bourgeois restoration” and “must inevitably in future stages seek supports for itself in property relations” entailing “its conversion into a new possessing class”.[149]

In fact, of course, the victory of the Soviet Union in the war, (Trotsky had predicted defeat),[150] was followed not by the slightest sign of a move towards a “bourgeois counter-revolution”[151] but on the contrary, by the establishment under the leadership of allegedly “counter-revolutionary” Communist Parties of socialist property relations in thirteen other countries and the emergence of a world socialist system competing with the capitalist one. Moreover, since Stalin’s death in 1953, many of the most negative features of Stalinism spotlighted by Trotsky, have been dismantled. This “de-Stalinisation”, inadequate as it is, has not occurred through the “inevitable” violent political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy led by a mythical “Soviet section of the Fourth International” as forecast and advocated in The Revolution Betrayed.[152] It has taken place essentially through the initiative of forces within the Communist Party (which Trotsky had written off as “disintegrated”[153], “dead”[154], and “no longer the vanguard of the proletariat”[155]) and its leading organs, and within “the bureaucracy”, which was proportionately harder hit by Stalin’s purges than any other section of the population and which on Trotsky’s definitions[156] included all Party, YCL, State, co-operative and collective farm leaders, officials, managers, technicians, foremen, and their families, drawn from among the most advanced sections of the working class and peasantry and constituting when Stalin died some 22 million people.

A fundamental Marxist criticism of Stalinism, which still remains to be made, will not proceed from Trotsky’s premises, although his writings should be studied for the many valuable lessons – both positive and negative – that they hold for us. Yet even where his occasional insights are at their most brilliant, it is within the framework of a fundamentally false sociological model, which prevented him from understanding the laws of development of Soviet society or grasping the (admittedly new and unprecedented) phenomenon of Stalinism in

its complexity and many-sidedness. Hence, the unkindness with which history has treated his major predictions that we have quoted in the course of this article.

(e) The Moscow Trials

In the Soviet Union in the years 1936-38, at the height of Stalin's mass repressions, there took place three public trials at which some of the best known Old Bolsheviks and leaders of the revolution pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy, treason, terrorism, espionage and wrecking against the Soviet Union in collaboration with the leaders of Nazi Germany and Japan, to whom they were allegedly planning to cede huge slices of Soviet territory. The main defendant in these trials, in absentia, was Leon Trotsky, who was alleged from his exile abroad to have masterminded the conspiracy, seeing this as the only practicable way to overthrow Stalin and get back into power.

Re-reading the verbatim reports of the trials,[157] alongside Trotsky's defence[158] and the findings of the counter-trials conducted in Mexico by the Dewey Commission,[159] one can see that there were a number of demonstrable distortions of fact in the trial confessions that should at the time have given rise to concern and questioning. However, finding it virtually impossible to believe that a socialist country would resort to legal frame-ups or that the accused would charge themselves with crimes which they never committed,[160] the international communist movement accepted the trials as evidence that Trotsky and his followers were acting as agents of fascism against the Soviet Union and communism.

Khrushchev's revelations at the Twentieth Congress of the methods of torture used at Stalin's bidding to extract false confessions from Communist leaders[161] followed by the rehabilitation of the Hungarian Communist leader, Rajk, the Bulgarian Communist leader, Kostov, and later the Czechoslovak Communist leader, Slansky, already cast doubt upon confessions of guilt of this

character. Certain rehabilitations and revelations in the Soviet

Union, are, however, of such a nature as to undermine the validity specifically of the Moscow Trials. Thus, the assassination of Kirov, the suspicious circumstances surrounding which were revealed at the 20th and 22nd CPSU Congresses, was pivotal to the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial of 1936, and played a role in that of Radek, Piatakov, etc., the next year. The rehabilitation of Marshall Tukhachevsky and the generals shot with him after a secret trial in 1937,[162] on whose guilt an important part of the case of the 1938 trial (Bukharin, Krestinsky, Rykov, etc.) was based,[163] knocks a large part of the bottom out of the latter. If any further proof of the invalidity of the trials were needed, it came in the autumn of 1963 when the Soviet Government newspaper, Izvestia, published a rehabilitation of the ex-Trotskyist, Krestinsky, one of the chief defendants at the 1938 trial at which he was condemned to death. At the trial he was alleged to have met Trotsky in France in 1933 and to have had the crucial role of establishing and maintaining illegal connections between him and the "Trotskyite Centre" in the USSR.[164]

It is to be hoped that the Soviet Union will soon officially revise these trials, which are said to be still "under investigation" and to which (as far as I have been able to ascertain) no reference has appeared for twelve years in any Soviet book or article. Without waiting for this, however, I believe we have sufficient evidence to warrant our following the lead of the Italian Communist Party which, since November 1961, has publicly rejected the accusations of a criminal character against Trotsky made at the trials, but expressed the view that the struggle against him in essential political elements was a correct one.[165] The absence of a public revision of former support for the trials by British communists provides an opportunity for the SLL in particular to harass us persistently on this question. Such a revision, necessary above all in the interests of truth, would also remove this convenient weapon from their armoury. Moreover, it would emphasise the essential point, understood by most British communists for many years now, that our opposition to Trotskyism is on political grounds, and our public controversies with its supporters can be fought only with political weapons.

Notes

* This article by Monty Johnstone, originally published in Cogito, No. 5, appears here in a slightly edited form.

[1] Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast (London, 1963), pp. 249-250.

[2] Quoted by I. Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, (London, 1954), pp. 83-84.

[3] The Case of Leon Trotsky, (New York, 1937), p. 471.

[4] Deutscher, op. cit., p. 89.

[5] V. I. Lenin, Selected Works, (London, 1936-38), (hereafter S.W.), II, pp. 442-6.

[6] L. Trotsky, Nashi Politicheskie Zadachi, (Geneva, 1904), pp. 73, 75. Emphasis in original.

[7] Lenin, S.W., II, pp. 448, 427. Emphasis in original.

[8] Trotsky, op. cit., p. 54.

[9] Ibid., p. 98.

[10] L. Trotsky in New International (New York), October 1939, p. 297.

[11] Lenin, Collected Works (London 1963), Volume 16, p. 391. (See, also, Lenin's article, 'Violation of Unity under cover of Cries for Unity', in S.W., IV, pp. 187-208.)

[12] Lenin, S.W., IV, p. 42.

[13] S.W., IV, p. 286.

[14] L. Trotsky to N. S Chkheidze, 1st April 1913 in Trotski et le Trotskisme: Textes et Documents (Paris, 1937), pp. 60-61.

[15] L. Trotsky to M. S. Olminsky, 6th December 1921, ibid., p. 62.

[16] The Prophet Armed, p. 176.

[17] L. Trotsky, In Defence of Marxism (New York, 1963), p. 141.

** The Socialist Labour League (SLL) was an ultra-left organisation claiming to be Trotskyist. Its paper was called Newsletter. In 1973 it changed its name to the Workers Revolutionary Party. During the mid-1980s, plagued by splits, it disintegrated.

[18] ‘Open letter from NEC of SLL to Communist Party Congress Delegates’, Newsletter, 1st April 1961.

[19] Lenin, S.W., IV, pp. 197-8.

[20] The Prophet Armed, p. 93.

[21] L. Trotsky, The Stalin School of Falsification (New York, 1937), p. 105. Trotsky reproduces a proof of an alleged suppressed page of the Minutes of the Petrograd Committee of the Bolsheviks.

[22] Quoted frequently by Trotskyists, e.g. Jack Gale, ‘The Lies about Trotsky are wearing thin’, in Newsletter, 27th November 1965, and most recently, by Ernest Mandel, ‘Trotsky’s Marxism: an Anti-Critique’, in New Left Review (London), January/February 1968, p. 34, in reply to N. Krasso’s very interesting criticism of Trotsky’s relation to the Party in New Left Review July/August 1967. Actually, as we shall see, Trotsky was to clash again seriously politically with Lenin over the Brest-Litovsk Treaty after he had been in the Party for less than six months.

[23] S.L.L. Open Letter, ibid., Emphasis in original.

[24] Mandel, Ibid., p. 33. My emphasis.

[25] K. Marx and F. Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (London, 1946), p. 38.

[26] K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works (London, 1950), Vol. I, pp. 102, 108.

[27] Lenin, S.W., III, p. 36.

[28] Ibid., p. 73. My emphasis.

[29] Ibid., p. 82.

[30] Ibid., p. 41.

[31] Ibid., p. 35.

[32] Ibid., p. 99.

[33] Ibid., p. 145. My emphasis.

[34] Quoted by Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, p. 219.

[35] Lenin, S.W., IV, p. 207.

[36] L. Trotsky, Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects (New York, 1965), pp. 237, 247. Trotsky's emphasis.

[37] Ibid., p. 203.

[38] L. Trotsky, Preface (1922) to 1905 (Moscow, 1922), p. 4.

[39] L. Trotsky, Permanent Revolution, pp. 8-9.

[40] Ibid., pp. 251, 253-4, Trotsky's emphasis

[41] Lenin, S.W., V, pp. 162-3.

[42] S.W., VI, p. 33. Lenin's emphasis.

[43] Lenin, Collected Works, (London/New York, n.d.) XX/I, p. 207.

[44] Lenin, S.W., VI, p. 385.

[45] Trotsky, Permanent Revolution, p. 103.

[46] Ibid., p. 109. Trotsky's emphasis.

[47] Lenin, S.W., VI, p. 33. Lenin's emphasis.

[48] See ibid., p. 501.

[49] Ibid., p. 32

[50] See, e.g., L. Trotsky, The Lessons of October (London, 1925), p. 21. His qualification that it "came too late to have any stability" and "was full of contradictions" does not detract from this. His statement (p. 28) that "considering February by itself, and not as a step towards October, it meant no more than this – that Russia had advanced to the position of, let us say, the bourgeois republic of France" itself indicates the measure of the advance made from the oppressive and semi-feudal conditions under the Tsarist autocracy. In fact Lenin put the position more correctly when he wrote in April 1917 that this revolution "has gone farther than the ordinary bourgeois-democratic revolution, but has not yet reached a 'pure' dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". (S.W., VI, p. 49. Emphasis in original.)

[51] S.W., VI, p. 503. (Lenin's emphasis) Only in this context is it possible to

understand Lenin's statement, quoted by Trotsky (Permanent Revolution, p. 106), that "down to the Summer and even the Autumn of 1918, our revolution was to a large extent a bourgeois revolution". (S.W., VIII, p. 37.) Lenin meant in particular that in these early months of Soviet power a large place was given to carrying out the bourgeois task of giving the land to the peasants for individual cultivation. This was however subsidiary to the essentially Socialist tasks of the revolution.

[52] S.W., III, p. 100.

[53] Ibid., p. 547

[54] A clinging to these assumptions led many old Bolsheviks to continue to adhere to the aim of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry immediately after the February Revolution and initially to oppose Lenin when he returned to Russia in April and urged the Party to pass over to the stage of struggle for a Socialist revolution.

[55] S.W., III, p.145.

[56] L. Trotsky, Introduction to H. Isaacs, Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution (London, 1938), p. xxi.

[57] L. Trotsky, Results and Prospects, p. 205.

[58] A.A. Lunacharsky, Revolutionary Silhouettes (London, 1967) p. 62.

[59] Quoted in Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, p. 258.

[60] Trotsky, The Lessons of October, pp. 23-24.

[61] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[62] Lenin, S.W., V, p. 162.

[63] It is not possible to take very seriously – in view of this and of the nature of the case – the one bit of "evidence" offered by Trotsky on this point: the statement by his boundlessly devoted but neurotic supporter, Yoffe, to the effect that he had heard Lenin saying that Trotsky had been politically right ever since 1915. Yoffe wrote this in 1927 in a farewell letter designed for posthumous publication just before, desperately sick with polyneruitis and tuberculosis, he committed suicide as a dramatic protest against Trotsky's expulsion from the Party. (See L. Trotsky, My Life, New York 1960, p. 537. For information on Yoffe, see Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, p. 193.)

[64] The Platform of the Left Opposition, London, 1963), p. 102. My emphasis.

[65] Bulletin of Marxist Studies, (New York, n.d.) No.1. The Chinese Revolution, by L Trotsky, p. 21. Preobrazhensky's brief letter to Trotsky (p. 19) powerfully challenges his theory of "permanent revolution" as applied to both Russia and China.

[66] The Lessons of October, pp. 20-21.

[67] The Permanent Revolution, p. 112.

[68] Ibid., p. 110.

[69] The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, (London, 1963), p. 38.

[70] The Fourth International, (Paris), Winter 1958, p. 27.

[71] J. Stalin, The October Revolution, (Moscow, 1934), p. 30. (The passage has been inexcusably expunged from the text of the article published in Stalin's Works, Moscow, 1953, iv, p. 157.) This statement, made by Stalin only a year after the Revolution with the events still fresh in his mind, is more convincing that the statements contradicting it that he was to make in later years when engaged in controversy with Trotsky. Nor do the attacks on Stalin for exaggerating Trotsky's role in his 1918 article that certain Soviet historians have made in recent years seem to me convincing. None have to the best of my knowledge ventured to offer an explanation as to what possible motive Stalin could have had for doing that.

[72] M. Gorky, Lenine et le Paysan Russe (Paris, 1924), p. 95.

[73] M. Gorky, Days with Lenin, (London, n.d.), p. 57. Lasalle was a prominent German Socialist leader of the last century whom Marx criticised for his

opportunism, egotism and ambition, but whose “immortal service” he recognised in forming an independent workers’ party in 1863.

[74] Lenin, ‘The Revolutionary Phrase’, pp. 85-86.

[75] Ibid., p. 97

[76] Quoted by Deutscher, Prophet Armed, p. 379.

[77] Les Bolcheviks et la Revolution d’Octobre: Proces verbaux du Comite Central, août 1917 – février 1918 (Paris, 1964), pp. 287-294.

[78] Ibid., p. 290.

[79] ‘The Revolutionary Phrase’, p. 81.

[80] Ibid., p. 86.

[81] L. Trotsky, My Life, (New York, 1960), pp. 393-4.

[82] The Case of Leon Trotsky (London, 1937), p. 51.

[83] S.W., IX, p. 27.

[84] Ibid., p. 23.

[85] Ibid., p. 7.

[86] Quoted by I. Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, pp. 449, 501.

[87] Ibid., p. 502.

[88] S.W., IX, p. 29.

[89] Quoted by Lenin, S.W., IX, pp. 63-4.

[90] The Prophet Armed, p. 503.

[91] S.W., IX, p. 30. Emphasis in original.

[92] Ibid., p. 3.

[93] See ibid., pp. 131-134. By factions were understood “groups with separate

platforms striving to separate themselves to a certain extent and to create their own group discipline." (p. 131). Trotsky at the 13th Party Congress in 1924 was to dissociate himself from a statement of his supporters by denying that he was in favour of either factions or groups in the Party, saying that it was "impossible to make any distinction between a faction and a group". (13 s'eze R.KP.b., Moscow, 1924, p. 165). His statements in later years, not to speak of his practice, were, however, to contradict this denial.

[94] S.W., IX, p. 70.

[95] Later Trotsky was to argue that he formulated these views purely in the context of the special conditions of "War Communism" after the rejection of proposals he had made in 1920 to modify this by introducing incentive payments. (My Life, pp. 463-6). However, at the Tenth Congress, when "War Communism" was replaced by the New Economic Policy that was to go further than Trotsky's proposals of the previous year, he maintained that his proposals for the militarisation of labour remained valid and that they were not necessarily connected with "War Communism". (See The Prophet Armed, p. 497).

[96] Ibid., p. 72.

[97] Ibid., p. 9.

[98] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[99] Ibid., p. 9.

[100] Ibid., p. 73.

[101] V.I. Lenin, Letter to the Congress (Moscow, n.d.), p. 11.

[102] His ‘Theses on Industry’, but not the report with which he introduced them, appeared in Labour Monthly (London), July and August, 1923.

[103] What is, of course, necessary in building Socialism is to find an acceptable balance between the two.

[104] Quoted by I. Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed, pp. 101-2.

[105] Die Kommunistische Parte! der Sowjetunion in Resolutionen and Beschlussen der Parteitage, Konferenzen and Plenen des Z. K. (Berlin, 1957), Vol. IV, pp. 251, 253.

[106] In his Testament, Lenin had warned that “Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated boundless authority on his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution”. (Letter to the Congress, p. 11.)

[107] L. Trotsky, The New Course (London, 1956), p. 24. After the Twentieth Congress, Gerry Healy’s publishing house brought out this new English edition of the pamphlet to promote a big drive to recruit members of the Communist Party and the Y.C.L. His group was not without success at the time, but almost every single person that his group recruited then subsequently left it, often with

recriminations about the bureaucratic methods that they found there.

[108] Stalin, Works, (Moscow, 1953), Vol. VI, pp. 28-29.

[109] The Prophet Unarmed, p. 131. I must make it clear that – despite such criticisms as this which I have quoted in this article – Isaac Deutscher's overall appraisal of Trotsky's role in this and in other spheres is a predominantly positive one. (See his introduction to The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology, New York, 1964, his Preface to The Prophet Unarmed, and his Postscript to The prophet Outcast). He was, however, much too fine a Marxist historian to let his sympathies for Trotsky affect the rigid objectivity with which he presented each episode in his Trotsky trilogy, which is one of the great biographies of our time.

[110] The evidence points strongly to the assassin, Mercader or "Jacson", who posed as a disillusioned follower of Trotsky, having in fact acted on behalf of Stalin and the G.P.U. After completing his 20-year jail sentence he left Mexico on a Czechoslovak plane for an undisclosed destination.

[111] See History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, (Moscow, 1960), pp. 396, 409.

[112] Stalin did not mean countries belonging to Soviet Russia, but countries which followed the Russian lead in setting up Soviets (Councils of Workers and Peasants) which would win power.

[113] J. Stalin, Leninism, (London, 1928), pp. 214-216; Works, (Moscow, 1953), Vol. VI, pp. 418-420.

[114] I cannot in the scope of this article examine the question of how far these proposals corresponded to the real economic possibilities existing at the time they were advanced. It is one of the myths of vulgar Trotskyism that the implementation by Stalin after 1928 of more far-reaching plans than had been put forward by the Opposition in itself proves that the latter was correct. As Maurice Dobb writes, "it does not follow that what may have been practicable in 1928-29 was necessarily practicable at an earlier date when both industry and agriculture were weaker." (M. Dobb, Soviet Economic Development since 1917, London, 1948, pp. 206-7. See also, R. W. Davies, "The Inadequacies of Russian Trotskyism", in Labour Review (London, July-August 1957). However, I would accept the argument that, if the Party had heeded earlier the Opposition's warnings against the dangerous growth in the power of the Kulaks (rich peasants) in the countryside, the process of collectivisation in 1929-30 could have been less violent. As against this, though, the Trotskyists' economic policies favouring the exploitation of the countryside by the town through a system of price differentials which would keep up the price of industrial products at the expense of agricultural prices (see, e. g. The New Economics, by Preobrazhensky, the Opposition's chief economist) anticipated theoretically much of the approach to the peasantry that from 1929 Stalin was to apply in practice.

[115] L. Trotsky, 'Young People, Study Politics', in Fourth International (London), January 1966, p. 34. Curiously enough, Trotsky was being reproached in Soviet histories in the early 1930s for his opposition in 1920 to the Red Army's advance on Warsaw, said to have been "due to a Social-Democratic prejudice to the effect that it was wrong to carry revolution into a country from the outside." (N. Popov, Outline History of the Communist Parry of the Soviet Union, New York, Part II, n. d., p. 101.)

[116] See, especially quotations 6, 8 and 9 on page 10.

[117] L. Trotsky, The Programme of Peace, (Colombo, 1956), p. 18.

[118] L. Trotsky, Stalinism and Bolshevism, (London, 1956), p. 9. (Emphasis in original)

[119] The Programme of Peace, pp. 20-21.

[120] Where is Trotsky Going? (London, 1928), pp. 53-54.

[121] L. Trotsky, The Third International After Lenin, (New York, 1957), p. 47

[122] Ibid., p. 49.

[123] L. Trotsky, Third International, p. 49.

[124] Ibid.

[125] L. Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed, (New York, 1957), pp. 6ff.

[126] L. Trotsky, in Workers' International News (London), July 1938, p. 1.

[127] Ibid., p. 2.

[128] Isaac Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography, (London, 1959) pp. 286-7

[129] New International, March 1935, p. 40.

[130] E. Mandel, New Left Review, No. 47, p. 42. This type of definition of Socialism is on a par with Trotsky's contention that Russia could not be said to have socialism till "the average productivity of every member of socialist society is higher, even substantially higher, than that of a capitalist worker". (L. Trotsky, New International, October 1935, p. 178.)

[131] Lenin, Selected Works, VII, pp. 85-87. Italics in original. Cf. also Selected Works VIII, p. 239. It is possible to find modifications of this definition of Socialism in certain other passages in Lenin, but these quoted here are the most typical.

[132] N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, An ABC of Communism (London 1924), pp. 3456.

[133] Cf. J. P Cannon, the veteran U.S. Trotskyist leader in his ABC of Trotskyism (London, 1945) which served as a basic textbook for English-speaking Trotskyists for many years:

"I … consider the terms Socialism and Communism interchangeable … According to Marx and Engels, as you approach the classless Socialism or Communist society, the government … eventually withers away…" (ABC of Trotskyism, Workers International News Special, London, 1945.)

[134] L. Trotsky, Results and Prospects, p. 220.

[135] I have quoted Lenin's statements on this fairly fully in my article on Trotsky and Socialism in One Country in New Left Review, No. 50, July-August 1968. I am grateful to the Editor of N. L. R., for his permission to incorporate parts of that article into this section of the present study.

[136] Selected Works, IX, p. 381 and p. 403.

[137] Selected Works, VII, p. 361.

[138] In his article On Co-operation, Lenin characterises this type of co-operative property, based on nationalisation of the land, as essentially Socialistic in character. (Selected Works, IX, p. 407.)

[139] J. V. Stalin, The Final Victory of Socialism in the Soviet Union, Reply to Ivanov, 12-238 (London, n.d.), pp. 3, 6. In his letter Stalin reiterated his previous qualification that "the final victory of Socialism, in the sense of full guarantee against the restoration of bourgeois property relations, is possible only on an international scale" and not so long as the Soviet Union was surrounded by numerous capitalist countries. (pp. 6-7.)

[140] P. Togliatti, Questions Posed by the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Interview with Nuovi Argumenti, (London, 1956), p. 8.

[141] See e.g. The Newsletter, 9 March, 1968: "Stalin's theory of 'Socialism in

one country' led directly to the economic chaos and political purges of the 1930s…" No attempt is made to explain the causal connections or to tell us, if this theory was responsible for the 'economic chaos', which theory was then responsible for the very great economic successes accepted by Trotsky to have taken place in this period.

[142] L. Trotsky, In Defence of Marxism, (New York, 1965).

[143] L. Trotsky, The Workers' State and the Question of Thermidor and Bonapartism (London, n.d., S. L. L. duplicated pamphlet), p. 7.

[144] The Case of Leon Trotsky, p. 282.

[145] L. Trotsky, In Defence of Marxism, pp. 15-16, 20.

[146] L. Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, p. 261.

[147] Ibid., p. 272.

[148] L. Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, p. 229. It is interesting to note that after the last war the Trotskyist Fourth International (there was still only one at that time), far from making any self-criticism or analysis of their cardinal error, went on to repeat it. In 1946, under the heading "The Power of Marxist Prognosis", its International Conference claimed that "in every important respect the analysis of the Fourth International has stood the test of time", (Workers' International News, London, April-May, 1946, p. 171), and proceeded in a resolution to state

that “only the intervention of the proletarian revolution can prevent a fatal outcome for the U.S.S.R. in its present trial of strength with imperialism”. (Quatrième Internationale, Paris, April-May 1946, p. 18). It was of course at pains to assert that the war had “marked the brutal bankruptcy” of … “the theory of Socialism in One Country”. (Ibid., p. 16). 20 years later the fatal outcome had not materialised, but faithful Trotskyists were not inclined to let such banal considerations modify their views. Thus, in the Newsletter of Dec. 18, 1965, we find S. L. L. National Committee member Jack Gale asserting that “the bureaucracy” would “bring about the overthrow of the Soviet Union if it is not removed.” Never say die!

[149] L. Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, pp. 253-4.

[150] Ibid., p. 227.

[151] Ibid., p. 290.

[152] Ibid., pp. 284-290.

[153] L. Trotsky, Stalinism and Bolshevism, p. 8.

[154] L. Trotsky, Ibid., p. 13.

[155] L. Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, p. 138.

[156] L. Trotsky, Ibid., pp.135 ff.

[157] Reports of Court Proceedings of the Trial of the Trotskyite-Zinoviev Centre (Moscow 1936), of the Trial of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre (Moscow 1937), of the Trial of the Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites (Moscow, 1938).

[158] The Case of Leon Trotsky, (London, 1937).

[159] Not Guilty (London, 1938).

[160] See, e. g. J.R. Campbell, Soviet Policy and its Critics (London, 1939), p. 265.

[161] The Dethronement of Stalin: Full text of the Krushchev Speech (Manchester Guardian Pamphlet,1956), esp. pp. 13-18, 25. Although this speech, delivered at a closed session of the Congress, has still not been published in Russia, there is no question whatsoever about the genuineness of this text.

[162] Krushchev made public their innocence in his reply to discussion at the 22nd C.P.S.U. Congress in 1961, revealing that the Presidium of the Party had already approved their rehabilitation in 1957.

[163] Trial of Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, pp. 186, 252-4. Evidence was given that “in Trotsky’s opinion, Tukhachevsky and the military group were to be the decisive force of the counter-revolutionary action.” (p.

245).

[164] Trial of Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, pp. 276 ff, 733. At the trial Krestinsky ‘confessed’ to having as early as 1921 negotiated an agreement between Trotsky and the German General Staff whereby they would give Trotsky 60,000 dollars a year to subsidise illegal Trotskyite activity in Russia and as payment for espionage information from him and Krestinsky (pp. 269-270).

[165] Report of Press Conference by G Pajetta, of the leadership of the Italian Communist Party, in L’Unita, December 1961.

Appendix B – Lenin's Suppressed Letters

By Alan Woods

The period covered by the following letters stretches from December 1922 to March 1923, i.e. the very last days of Lenin's political life, when he was struggling against an increasingly painful and incapacitating illness. The difficulty with which Lenin wrote is reflected in the briefness of these notes, often separated by long intervals, when his doctors forbade him to work. Yet despite their highly compressed nature, these letters bear witness to Lenin's complete understanding of the situation developing in the state and the party. Taken in conjunction with his last articles ('Pages from a Diary', 'On Co-operation', 'Our Revolution', 'How We Should Organise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection' and 'Better Fewer, But Better'), they constitute a worked-out programme for a struggle against bureaucratic degeneration.

In the last active period of his life, Lenin was chiefly absorbed by the problems of the Soviet economy under the New Economic Policy. In 1921, under the pressure of the millions of peasant small proprietors, the workers' state had been forced to retreat from the path of socialist planning and industrialisation, in order to procure grain for the starving workers in the cities. The old civil war practice of requisitioning grain had to be abandoned to placate the peasants, whose support was necessary if the workers' state was not to succumb to the reaction. A free market in grain was re-established, and concessions were made to the peasants and small traders, while the main levers of economic power (nationalised banks and heavy industries, state monopoly of foreign trade) remained in the hands of the workers' state.

This retreat had be enforced upon the Bolsheviks mainly by the delay of the workers of Europe in seizing power and coming to their aid. From 1905

onwards, Lenin had repeatedly re-iterated that without such assistance, the Russian workers could not hold onto state power. Given the backwardness, the illiteracy, the material and cultural impoverishment of Russia, the task facing the Bolsheviks was not to create a socialist, classless society but to save millions from starving to death, to re-build a shattered economy and to provide houses and elementary schools – i.e. to drag Russia into the twentieth century.

The triumph of socialism demands a development of the productive forces to a level unheard of in any previously existing society. Only when the conditions of general want and poverty are obliterated can the thoughts of Man be raised to loftier horizons than the grinding, day-to-day struggle to live. The conditions for such a transformation already exist in the world today. For the first time in human history we can say truthfully that there is no longer any need for anyone to starve, to be homeless, to be illiterate. The potential is there – in the science, technique and industry created by the development of capitalism itself which draws upon all the resources of the planet albeit in an incomplete, anarchic and undeveloped way. Only on the basis of an integrated, harmonious plan of production can this potential be realised. But this can only be carried out on the basis of common ownership of the means of production and a democratic socialist plan.

These elementary truths of Marxism were taken for granted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They did not lead the workers to victory in October 1917 with a view to

“building socialism” within the frontiers of the former tsarist empire, but to strike the first blow for the international socialist revolution:

“We have made the start,” wrote Lenin on the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution. “When, at what date and time, and the proletarians of which nations will complete this process is not important. The important thing is that the ice has been broken; the road is open, the way has been shown.”[1]

For Lenin, the first significance of the Russian Revolution was the example it provided in the eyes of the workers of the world. The failure of the revolutionary wave which swept across Europe in the period 1918-21 was the decisive factor in the subsequent development. On the basis of a victorious European revolution, the enormous potential mineral wealth of Russia, its vast labour force, could have been linked to the science, technique and industry of Germany, Britain and France. A Socialist United States of Europe could have transformed the lives of the peoples of Europe and Asia and opened the way for a Socialist World Federation. Instead, as a result of the cowardice and ineptitude of the labour leaders, the European working classes faced decades of hardship, unemployment, Fascism and a new world war. On the other hand, the isolation of the only workers' state in the world in a backward, peasant country, opened the door to bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinist reaction.

The defeat of the German working class in March 1921 forced the Soviet Republic to look to its own resources in order to survive. In a speech on October 17, 1921, Lenin spelt out the consequences:

"You must remember that our Soviet land is impoverished after many years of trial and suffering and has no socialist France or socialist England as neighbours to keep us with their highly developed technology and highly developed industry. Bear that in mind! We must remember that at present all their highly developed technology and industry belong to the capitalists who are fighting us."[2]

In order to survive, it was necessary to conciliate the desire of the peasant to make profit, even at the expense of the working class and the building up of industry – the only real basis for a transition to socialism.

Towards Capitalism or Socialism?

The concessions given to the peasants, small businessmen and speculators ("Nepmen") staved off economic collapse in 1921-22. The trade between town and countryside was restored, but on terms greatly disadvantageous to the former. The reduction of taxes on the peasant cut into the funds necessary for investment in industry. Heavy industry stagnated, while much of light industry was in private hands. (In 1923, 88% of industrial enterprises were privately owned or leased, but these were mainly small enterprises.) Even the revival in agriculture strengthened the capitalist, not the socialist element in Soviet society. Huge profits were made by the kulaks, with the largest and most fertile farms and the capital necessary for equipment, horses and fertiliser. In fact, it soon became clear that under NEP, the difference between the rich and poor in the villages was growing at an alarming rate. The kulaks took to hoarding grain to push up prices, even buying up the grain of the poor peasants to sell it back to them at a later date when prices rose.

These tendencies were watched with anxiety by Lenin, who repeatedly warned of the need for the working class to keep a tight rein on the levers of the economy. At the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, in November 1922, Lenin put the matter in a nutshell:

"The salvation of Russia lies not only in a good harvest on the peasant farms – that is not enough; and not only in the good condition of light industry, which provides the peasantry with consumer goods – this, too, is not enough; we also need heavy industry. And to put it in good condition will require several years of work. Heavy industry needs state subsidies. If we are not able to provide them, we shall be doomed as a civilised state, let alone a socialist state."

At this period Lenin grappled with the problem of electrification as a possible area where a breach could be made in the solid wall of Russian backwardness. Trotsky, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the overall state planning of industry, which had been practically lost sight of under NEP. All along he stressed the need to strengthen Gosplan, the state planning agency, as a means of

encouraging a general planned revival of industry. Lenin, at first, was distrustful of the idea – not because he rejected planning but because of the prevailing scourge of bureaucracy in Soviet institutions, which, he feared, would turn an enlarged and strengthened Gosplan into a paper game.

However different their approaches to this question, Lenin and Trotsky were in complete agreement about the urgent need to strengthen the socialist elements in the economy and to end backsliding in the direction of “peasant capitalism”. However, such was the pressure of the kulak interest that even a section of the Bolshevik leadership began to bend. The question of which road the Soviet power would take was posed point-blank by the controversy over the monopoly of foreign trade which broke out in March 1922.

The Monopoly of Foreign Trade

The monopoly of foreign trade, established in Apri1 1918, was a vital measure for ensuring the socialist economy against the threat of penetration and domination by foreign capital. Under NEP the monopoly became even more important as a bulwark against the growing capitalist tendencies. Early in 1922, at Lenin’s request, A. M. Lezhava drafted “Theses on Foreign Trade” which emphasised the need to strengthen the monopoly and strictly supervise exports and imports. Despite this, the Party Central Committee was split. Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev opposed Lenin’s proposals and advocated the relaxation of the monopoly, while Sokolnikov, Bukharin and Pyatakov actually went so far as to call for its abolition.

On May 15, Lenin wrote the following letter to Stalin:

“Comrade Stalin,

“In view of this, please get a directive passed through the Politburo by collecting the votes of the members that ‘The CC reaffirms the monopoly of foreign trade and resolves that a stop be put everywhere to the working up of the question of merging the Supreme Economic Council with the Commissariat for Foreign Trade’. All People’s Commissars to sign confidentially and return the original to Stalin. No copies to be made.”[3]

At the same time he wrote to Stalin and to Frumkin (Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Trade) stressing that “a formal ban should be put on all talk and negotiations, commissions, etc., concerning the relaxation of the foreign trade monopoly.”[4]

Stalin’s reply was evasive:

“I have no objections to a ‘formal ban’ on measures to mitigate the foreign trade monopoly at the present stage. All the same, I think that mitigation is becoming indispensable.”

On 26 May, Lenin suffered the first onslaught of his illness, which put him out of activity until September. In the meantime, in spite of Lenin’s request, the question of “mitigating” the monopoly was raised again. On 12 October, Sokolnikov moved a resolution at the plenary session of the Central Committee, for the relaxation of the foreign trade monopoly. Lenin and Trotsky were absent, and the resolution was carried overwhelmingly.

On 13 October, Lenin wrote to the Central Committee through Stalin, with whom he had already discussed the matter. Lenin protested against the decision and demanded that the question should be raised again at the next plenum in

December. Subsequently, Stalin wrote to members of the CC:

"Comrade Lenin's letter has not persuaded me that the decision of the CC was wrong … Nevertheless, in view of Comrade Lenin's insistence that fulfilment of the CC plenary meeting decision be delayed, I shall vote for a postponement so that the question may be again raised for discussion at the next plenary meeting which Comrade Lenin will attend."[5]

On 16 October, it was agreed to postpone the matter till the next plenum. However, as the date of the plenum approached, Lenin became increasingly worried that the state of his health would not permit him to speak. On 12 December, he wrote his first letter to Trotsky asking him to take upon himself "the defence of our common opinion of the unconditional necessity of preserving and reinforcing the monopoly of foreign trade." The letters written by Lenin clearly indicate the political bloc that existed between Lenin and Trotsky at this time. They demonstrate Lenin's implicit faith in Trotsky's political judgments, a faith born of years of common work at the head of the Soviet state. And it is not accidental that at this time Lenin would turn to no-one else to defend his views on the Central Committee. Even his other confidants, Frumkin and Stomoniakov, were non-members of the Central Committee.

Learning of Lenin's preparations for a struggle and his bloc with Trotsky, the Central Committee backed down without a fight. On 18 December, the October resolution was unconditionally rescinded. The first round in the battle against the pro-kulak element in the party leadership was won by the Leninist faction. The battle was continued after Lenin's death by Trotsky and the Left Opposition, who alone held high the banner and programme of Lenin in the teeth of the Stalinist political counter-revolution.

Lenin Against Bureaucracy

Friedrich Engels long ago explained that in any society in which art, science and government are the preserve of a minority, that minority will use and abuse its position in its own interests. Because of the isolation of the revolution in a backward country the Bolsheviks were obliged to call on the services of a host of former tsarist officials to keep the state and society running. These elements, who had held the workers' government to ransom in the first days of the revolution, gradually realised that the Soviet power was not going to be crushed by armed force. After the dangers of the civil war had passed, many former enemies of Bolshevism began to infiltrate the state, the trade unions, and even the party.

The first "purge", in 1921, had nothing in common with the later grotesque frame-up trials of Stalin, in which the entire Old Bolshevik leadership were murdered. No one was tried, killed or imprisoned. But special party commissions were set up to expel from the party the thousands of careerists and bourgeois who had joined in order to further their own interests. The offences for which people were expelled were "bureaucratism, careerism, abuse by party members of their party or Soviet status, violation of comradely relations within the party, dissemination of unfounded and unverified rumours, insinuations or other reports reflecting on the party or individual members of it, and destructive of the unity and authority of the party."

In order to carry out a struggle against bureaucracy, Lenin advocated the setting up of a "Commission on Workers and Peasants Inspection" (RABKRIN), as the highest arbiter and guardian of party morality, and as a weapon against alien elements in the Soviet state apparatus. At the centre of RABKRIN Lenin placed a man whom he respected for his organisational abilities and strong character – Stalin.

Amongst other important functions, RABKRIN scrutinised the selection and appointment of responsible workers in the state and party. Whoever had the power to hold up the promotion of some and advance others obviously held a

weapon which could serve their own interests. Stalin did not have any scruple to use it for his own ends. RABKRIN turned from a weapon against bureaucracy into a hotbed of careerist intrigue. Stalin cynically used his position in RABKRIN, and later his control of the party Secretariat, to gather around himself a bloc of yes-men – nonentities whose only allegiance was to the man who helped them climb into comfortable positions. From the highest arbiter of party morality, RABKRIN sank to the lowest depths of bureaucratic cynicism.

Trotsky noticed what was going on before Lenin, whose illness prevented his close supervision of party work. Trotsky pointed out that “those working in RABKRIN are chiefly workers who have come to grief in other fields”, and drew attention to the “extreme prevalence of intrigue in the organs of RABKRIN which has become a by-word throughout the country”.

Lenin continued to defend RABKRIN against Trotsky’s criticisms. Yet in his last works we see that his eyes were opened to the threat of bureaucracy from this quarter and the role of Stalin who guided it. In his article ‘How We Should Organise the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection’, Lenin connected the question to the bureaucratic deformation of the workers’ state apparatus:

“With the exception the Peoples Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, our state apparatus is to a considerable extent a survival of the past and has undergone hardly any serious change. It has only been slightly touched up on the surface, but in all other respects it is a most typical relic of our old state machine.”[6]

However, in ‘Better Fewer, But Better’, Lenin’s last article, written on 2 March 1923, he delivered the most scathing attack on RABKRIN:

“Let us say frankly that the Peoples Commissariat of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate does not at present enjoy the slightest authority. Everybody knows

that no other institutions are worse organised than those of our Workers and Peasants Inspection, and that under present conditions nothing can be expected from this People's Commissariat."

In the same article, Lenin included a remark directed straight at Stalin:

"Let it be said in parentheses that we have bureaucrats in our party offices as well as in other Soviet offices."

That Lenin singled out Stalin as the potential ringleader of a bureaucrats faction in the party is an example of his far-sightedness. At this particular time, Stalin's power in the "apparatus" was invisible to the majority even of party members, while most of the leaders did not believe him capable of using it, in view of his notoriously mediocre grasp of politics and theory. Even after Lenin's death, it was not Stalin, but Zinoviev who headed the "Troika" (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin) which pushed the party on the first, fateful steps away from the traditions of October under the guise of an attack on "Trotskyism".

It was no accident that Lenin's last advice to the party was to warn it against Stalin's "disloyal" and "intolerant" abuse of power and to advocate his removal from the post of general secretary.

The Struggle for Internationalism

The defeat of the European workers' revolution gave even more importance to the work of the Communist International for a revolution of the enslaved peoples of the East. The October Revolution gave a mighty impetus to the struggle of the colonies against their imperialist oppressors. In particular, the proud slogan of

the “rights of nations to self-determination” emblazoned on the banner of Bolshevism gave heart to the downtrodden millions of Asia and Africa.

Almost the first act of the workers’ government was to recognise the independence of Finland, although that inevitably meant granting independence to a hostile capitalist government. Naturally, Marxists stand firmly for the uniting of all peoples in a World Socialist Federation. But such unity cannot be brought about by force, but only by the free consent of the workers and peasants of the various countries. Above all, when the workers of a former imperialist nation take power, it is their bounden duty to respect the wishes of the peoples in the former colonies – even if they wish to secede. Unification can be brought about later, on the basis of example and persuasion.

In 1921, the Red Army was forced to intervene in Georgia, where the government had been consistently intriguing with Britain and other capitalist powers against the Soviet State. Lenin was extremely anxious that this military action should not be seen as the annexation of Georgia by Russia, thus identifying the Soviet state with the tsarist oppressors. He wrote letter after letter instructing Orzhonikidze, the representative of the Central Committee in Georgia, to pursue a “policy of concessions in relation to the Georgian intelligentsia and small traders”, and advocating the setting up of a “coalition with Jordania or similar Georgian Mensheviks”. On 10 March, he sent a telegram urging the need to “observe particular respect for the sovereign bodies of Georgia; to display particular attention and caution in regard to the Georgian population.”[7]

However, the activities of Orzhonikidze in Georgia were connected with the Stalin clique in the party. Stalin was working on proposals for the unification of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federation with the other, non-Russian Soviet Republics. In August 1922, while Lenin was out of action, a commission in which Stalin was the leading figure, was set up to work out the terms of unification.

When Stalin's theses appeared, they were firmly rejected by the Central Committee of the Georgian party. On 22 September, the Georgian Bolshevik leaders passed the following motion:

"The union in the form of the autonomisation of the independent republics, proposed on the basis of Stalin's theses is premature. A union of economic efforts and a common policy are necessary, but all attributes of independence should be preserved."[8]

The protests of the Georgians went unheeded. Stalin was bent on bulldozing through his proposals. The commission met on 23 and 24 September, under the chairmanship of Stalin's stooge Molotov. It rejected the Georgian resolution with one vote against (Mdivani, the Georgian representative). On 25 September, the materials of the Commission were sent to Lenin, who was convalescing at Gorki. Without waiting for Lenin's views, and without even a discussion in the Politburo, the Secretariat (Stalin's centre in the party) sent the Commission's decision to all CC members in preparation for the October Plenum.

On 26 September, Lenin wrote to the Central Committee via Kamenev urging caution on this question and warning against Stalin's attempt to rush the business through: "Stalin tends to be somewhat hasty." Lenin had arranged to meet him the following day. He did not yet suspect the lengths to which Stalin had gone to force unification through. However, even this letter indicates his opposition to any affront to the national aspirations of a small people and thus strengthen the hold of nationalism.

"The important thing is not to provide material for the 'pro-independence' people, not to destroy their independence, but to create 'another new storey, a federation of equal republics."[9]

Lenin's amendments were aimed to soften the tone of Stalin's original draft to make allowance for the "pro-independence" people, whom he considered, at this point, to be in the wrong. In answer to Lenin's mild comments, Stalin wrote to members of the Politburo on 27 September a number of abrupt and surly rejoinders, including the following:

"On the subject of paragraph four, in my opinion Comrade Lenin himself 'hurried' a little … There is hardly a doubt that this 'hurriedness' will 'supply fuel to the advocates of independence', to the detriment of the national liberalism of Lenin."[10]

Stalin's rude reply was the expression of his unconcealed annoyance at Lenin's "interference" in what he considered his private domain, accentuated by fear at the outcome of Lenin's intervention.

Stalin's fears were well-grounded. Following his discussion with Mdivani, Lenin became convinced that the Georgian business was being mishandled by Stalin, and set to work accumulating evidence. On 6 October, Lenin wrote a memo to the Politburo, 'On Combating Dominant National Chauvinism':

"I declare war to the death on dominant nation chauvinism. I shall eat it with all my healthy teeth as soon as I get rid of this accursed bad tooth."[11]

Lenin's Last Struggle

The full significance of what had happened in Georgia had not yet come home to Lenin. He did not know that Stalin, in order to strengthen his hand, had actually carried out a purge of the finest cadres of Georgian Bolshevism, replacing the

old central committee with new and more “pliant” elements.

What he did know was sufficient to arouse Lenin’s suspicions. In the following week he began quietly to collect information on the Georgian “affair”, and got the Central Committee to send Rykov and Dzerzhinsky to Tiflis to investigate the complaints of the Georgian Bolsheviks.

On 23 and 24 December, Lenin began to dictate his famous letters to the Congress to his secretary. He stressed that this was to be secret.[12] Lenin’s work proceeded slowly, painfully, interrupted by bouts of illness. But through it all, the idea becomes increasingly clear that the central enemy lay within the bureaucratic “apparat” of the state and party, and the man who stood at its head, Stalin.

In The Real Situation in Russia, Trotsky records the last conversation he had with Lenin, shortly before Lenin’s second stroke. In reply to Lenin’s suggestion that Trotsky should participate in a new commission to fight against bureaucracy (see ‘How We Should Organise the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection’), Trotsky replied as follows:

“‘Vladimir Ilyich, according to my conviction, in the present struggle with bureaucratism in the Soviet apparatus, we must not forget that there is going on, both in the provinces and in the centre, a special selection of officials and specialists, party, non-party, and half-party, around certain ruling party personalities and groups – in the provinces, in the districts, in the party locals and in the centre – that is, the Central Committee, etc. Attacking the Soviet officials you run into the party leader. The specialist is a member of his suite. In such circumstances I could not undertake this work.’

“Then Vladimir Ilyich reflected for a moment and – here I quote him practically

verbatim – said: ‘That is, I propose a struggle with Soviet bureaucratism, and you want to add to that the bureaucratism of the Organisation Bureau of the party.’ I laughed at the unexpectedness of this, because no such finished formulation of the idea was in my head. I answered, ‘I suppose that’s it’.

“Then Vladimir Ilyich said: ‘Well, all right, I propose a bloc,’ and I said: ‘I’m always ready to form a bloc with a good man’.”

This conversation is important for the light it sheds on the content of Lenin’s last works, especially the famous Testament, the letters on the national question and ‘Better Fewer, But Better’. The tone of his letters gets increasingly sharp, his targets more clearly defined, with every day. No matter what question he deals with, the central thought is the same, the need to combat the pressure of alien class forces in state and party, the rooting out of bureaucracy, the fight against Great-Russian chauvinism, the fight against the Stalin clique in the party.

Despite Lenin’s insistent requests that his notes be kept strictly secret, the first part of the Testament found its way into the hands of the Secretariat and Stalin, who immediately realised the danger of Lenin’s intervention, and took measures to prevent it. Severe pressure was put upon Lenin’s secretaries to prevent Lenin from discovering any news which might “upset” him.

Nevertheless, Lenin found out from Dzerzhinsky that, among other outrages perpetrated by the Stalin faction, Orzhonikidze had gone so far as to hit one of the Georgian oppositionists. This may seem a small thing when compared to the later Stalinist terror, but it shocked Lenin profoundly. His secretary noted in her diary for 30 January, 1923 the words of Lenin: “Just before I got ill Dzerzhinsky told me about the work of the Commission and about the ‘incident’ and this had a very painful effect on me.”[13]

To understand the enormity of this crime, it is necessary to know about the relations between the Russians (more correctly Great-Russians) and the national minorities who, under the Tsars, were treated with the same contempt and the same barbarous arbitrariness as the Africans and Indians were under the British Empire. The historic task of the Russian Revolution was to raise these despised minorities to the stature of full men, with their own rights and dignity. The idea of a representative of the Great-Russian nation abusing or striking a Georgian was a crime against proletarian internationalism, a tsarist monstrosity which would have been punished in the most drastic matter – by expulsion from the party at the very least. That is why Lenin poured out his wrath against Stalin and Orzhonikidze, demanding “exemplary punishment for those responsible”.

Stalin placed every obstacle in the way of Lenin’s receiving information from Georgia. Numerous passages from the diaries of Lenin’s secretaries give a clear picture of this bureaucratic harassment:

“On Thursday 25 January, he [Lenin] asked whether the materials [of the Georgian committee] had been received. I answered that Dzerzhinsky would not be arriving until Saturday. Therefore I had not been able to ask him.

“On Saturday I asked Dzerzhinsky, he said Stalin had the materials. I sent Stalin a letter, but he was out of town. Yesterday, 29 January, Stalin phoned, saying he could not give the materials without the Politburo. Asked whether I had not been telling Vladimir Ilyich things he was not to be told – how was it he was posted about current affairs? For instance, his article about the WPI (RABKRIN) showed that certain circumstances were known to him, I answered that I had not been telling anything and had no reason to believe he was posted about affairs. Today Vladimir Ilyich sent for me to learn the answer and said that he would fight to get the materials.”[14]

These few lines starkly reveal the bullying, bureaucratic manner with which Stalin attempted to defend his position against Lenin, whom he mortally feared,

even on his death-bed. There can be no clearer illustration of Stalin's "rudeness" and "disloyalty" to which Lenin refers in his Testament.

Lenin's distrustful attitude to the commission of Dzerzhinsky and the behaviour of the Central Committee is reflected in his instructions to his secretaries:

Why was the old CC of the CP of Georgia accused of deviationism?

What breach of discipline were they blamed for?

Why is the Transcaucasian Committee accused of suppressing the CC of the CP of Georgia?

The physical means of suppression, 'bio-mechanics'.

The line of the CC of the CP (of the RCP(B)) in Vladimir Ilyich's absence and in his presence.

Attitude of the Commission. Did it examine only the accusations against the CC of the CP of Georgia or also against the Transcaucasian Committee? Did it examine the 'bio-mechanics' incident? [refers to Orzhonikidze's violence to a Georgian]

The present situation (the election campaign, the Mensheviks, suppression, national discord).[15]

But Lenin's growing realisation of the disloyal and dishonest methods of elements in the party leadership made him also distrustful of his own secretariat. Were they not also being gagged by Stalin?

"On January 24 Vladimir Ilyich said: 'First of all about this "secret" job of ours [reference to the drafting of the Testament]. I know that you are deceiving me.'

To my assurances on the contrary, he answered ‘I have my own opinion about that’.”[16]

With difficulty, the sick Lenin managed to learn that the Politburo had accepted the conclusions of Dzerzhinsky’s Commission. It was at this time (2-6 February) that Lenin dictated ‘Better Fewer, But Better’, the most outspoken attack on Stalin and the party bureaucracy yet. The Georgian events had convinced Lenin that the rotten chauvinism of the state was the most dangerous indication of pressure from alien classes:

“Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first

think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past, which, although it has been overthrown, has not yet been overcome…”[17]

In his last public appearance at a political gathering, the Eleventh Congress of the

RCP(B), Lenin had warned that the state machine was escaping from the control of the Communists:

“The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it. It was like a car that is not responding to the steering, but going in the direction someone else desired as if it were being driven by some mysterious, lawless hand – God knows whose, perhaps of a profiteer, or of a private capitalist, or of both. Be that as it may, the car is not going quite in the direction the man at the, wheel imagines, and often it goes in an altogether different direction.”[18]

The poison of nationalism, the most characteristic feature of all forms of Stalinism, had its roots in the reaction of the petty bourgeois, the kulak, the Nepman and the Soviet official against the revolutionary internationalism of October.

Lenin proposed to fight against this reaction at the forthcoming congress, in alliance with Trotsky – the only member of the Central Committee he could trust to uphold his point of view.

He proposed to deal personally with the question of RABKRIN and was "preparing a bombshell" for Stalin. His conviction that the Party "apparat" was plotting to keep him out at all costs is illustrated by the remark of his secretary that "apparently, furthermore, Vladimir Ilyich has the impression that it was not the doctors who gave instructions to the Central Committee, but the Central Committee that gave instructions to the doctors."[19] Lenin's suspicions were only too well grounded. One of the ideas seriously canvassed on the Central Committee at this time was the printing of a special, single number of Pravda, especially for Lenin's consumption, in order to deceive him about the Georgian affair!

The argument that this was all for the good of Lenin's health does not hold water.

As he himself explained, nothing agitated and upset him so much as the disloyal actions of CC members and the tissue of lies with which they were camouflaged. The real attitude of Stalin towards the dying Lenin was revealed in a truly monstrous incident involving Krupskaya, Lenin's wife – attempting to defend her sick husband from the rude importunings of Stalin, she was rewarded by crude abuse from the "loyal disciple". Krupskaya describes the incident in a letter to Kamenev dated 23 December 1922:

“Lev Borisovich,

“Concerning the brief letter written by me at Vladimir Ilyich’s dictation with the doctors’ permission, Stalin phoned me yesterday and addressed himself to me in the crudest fashion. I have not been in the party for just a day. In the whole 30 years I have never heard a single rude word from one comrade. The interests of the Party and Ilyich are not less dear to me than to Stalin. Now I need the maximum self-control. I know better than any doctor what can or cannot be said to Ilyich, because I know what upsets him and what doesn’t, in any case better than Stalin.”[20]

Krupskaya begged Kamenev, a personal friend, to protect her “from rude interference in my personal life, unworthy brawling and threats”, adding that as far as Stalin’s threat of bringing her before a control commission was concerned: “I have no strength and no time to waste on such stupid squabbles. I am also a human being and my nerves are stretched to breaking point.”

Lenin’s threat to break off all comradely relations with Stalin and his accusations

of “rudeness” in the Testament are often explained away by vague references to this incident. But in the first place, what Stalin did was not a “personal” matter but a grave political offence, punishable by expulsion from the Party. The offence is magnified by the fact that Stalin’s position in the Party made it incumbent on him to root out such behaviour, not to champion it. However, this “little incident” must be seen in its proper context. It is only the most distasteful and obvious of the manifestations of Stalin’s disloyalty.

Lenin’s last active days were spent organising his fight against the Stalin faction at the Congress. He wrote a letter to Trotsky asking him to take up the defence of the Georgian comrades, and to the Georgian leaders warmly committing himself

to their cause. It should be noted that such emphatic expressions as “with all my heart” and “with very best comradely greetings” are very rarely met in the letters of Lenin, who preferred a more restrained style of writing. It was a measure of his commitment to the struggle. It should also be pointed out that Lenin’s bloc constituted a political faction – what was later known by the Stalinists as an “anti-party bloc”. The Stalinists had already organised their faction which controlled the party machine.

Fotieva, Lenin’s secretary, took down Lenin’s last notes on the Georgian question, evidently in preparation for a speech at the Congress:

“Vladimir Ilyich’s instructions that a hint be given to Stoltz that he [Lenin] was on the side of the injured party. Someone or other of the injured party to be given to understand that he was on their side. Three moments: (1) One should not fight. (2) Concessions should be made. (3) One cannot compare a large state with a small one. Did Stalin know? Why didn’t he react? The name ‘deviationist’ for a deviation towards chauvinism and Menshevism proves the same deviation with the dominant nation chauvinists. Collected printed matter for Vladimir Ilyich.”[21]

On 9 March, Lenin suffered his third stroke which left him paralysed and helpless. The struggle against bureaucratic degeneration passed to Trotsky and the Left Opposition. But Lenin laid the foundation of the programme of the Opposition, against bureaucracy, against the kulak menace, for industrialisation and socialist planning, for socialist internationalism and workers’ democracy.

April 1970

New Light on Lenin’s Suppressed Letters by Alan Woods

In recent years new material has come to light which entirely corroborates the analysis I made thirty years ago. In 1994, Yuri A. Buranov, a professor of history and head of the Department of Research at the former Central Archives of the CPSU, published a book called Lenin's Will, which republishes hitherto unknown material connected with Lenin's last struggle against Stalin, from the secret section of the archives. This material proves conclusively how Stalin attempted to isolate Lenin during his last illness and even went to the length of falsifying Lenin's dictations to his secretaries.

Despite his crippling illness, Lenin was planning to launch an attack on Stalin's faction at the Twelfth Congress. "From December 23 to 31," writes Buranov, "Lenin kept working diligently on his report for the CC at the Twelfth Congress."[22] The material proves that Lenin offered Trotsky a bloc at the Twelfth Congress. Buranov reproduces a letter from Kamenev to Stalin written on or shortly after December 22, 1922:

"Dear Joseph,

"Tonight Trotsky phoned me, saying that he had received a note from Starik ["The Old Man", Lenin], who, though he is happy with the congressional resolution on Vneshintorg [The Ministry of Foreign Trade], wants Trotsky to deliver a report on this question to a faction of the Congress and to prepare the ground to put this question to the Party Congress. Apparently, he means to strengthen his position. Trotsky did not offer his opinion, but he asked that this matter be handed over to the section of the CC responsible for the conduct of the Congress. I promised him to tell you about it, and I am doing this.

"I could not reach you on the phone.

“In my report I am going to present the resolution of the CC Plenum with fervour. I shake your hand.

“L. Kamenev.”[23]

Stalin replied immediately in terms that betray his alarm:

“Comrade Kamenev!

“I have received your note. I think we should confine ourselves to the statement in your report without bringing this up in the faction. How did Starik manage to organise this correspondence with Trotsky? Foerster [one of Lenin’s doctors] utterly forbade him to do it.

“J. Stalin.”[24]

Stalin’s alarm was understandable. He was terrified of Lenin’s intervention in the Congress. Using his control of the Party apparatus, he went to extraordinary lengths to keep Lenin isolated, putting pressure on his secretaries and doctors to do so. The news of Lenin’s correspondence with Trotsky therefore hit him like a thunderbolt. This was the immediate cause of the famous incident between Stalin and Krupskaya, which led Lenin to break off all personal and comradely relations with Stalin. “The same day,” writes Buranov, “Stalin offended Krupskaya with ‘the rudest escapade’, using ‘unbefitting swearing and threats’.”[25]

On December 23, 1922, Stalin learned from a document transcribed by one of the secretaries that Lenin advised the Congress that the Gosplan, the State Planning Commission, should be reorganised, “meeting in this respect the wishes of Comrade Trotsky”. Stalin’s position was seriously threatened by the bloc between Lenin and Trotsky. As Buranov correctly points out: “One must bear in mind that during the autumn of 1922 Lenin’s position on the national question, which coincided with Trotsky’s, was completely opposite from Stalin’s.”[26] Therefore, Stalin took the incredible step of altering the text of Lenin’s letter.

Lenin’s letter dated December 22, 1923 reads as follows:

“Then I intend to propose that the Congress should on certain conditions invest the State Planning Commission with legislative force, meeting, in this respect, the wishes of Comrade Trotsky, to a certain extent and on certain conditions.”[27]

The words in italics do not appear in the original handwritten text, and they change the meaning considerably. Buranov comments:

“It is most likely that the text was ‘improved’ sometime between December 24 and 29, 1922, when the CC members read Trotsky’s letter describing his plans for the reorganisation of the State Planning Commission and the CLD [the Council for Labour and Defence] … Lenin and Trotsky’s position on the problem came closer in December 1922.”[28]

In his introduction, Buranov states:

“There has been and still is speculation that Lenin’s dictations during that period, particularly his will, were later edited and altered by Joseph Stalin. I have found, in the top secret archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, one of the original manuscripts, which, I submit, proves that Lenin’s works were partly altered. The changes were made so skilfully that, for example, to the end of his life, Lev D. Trotsky never knew he dealt with the edited, not the original, text of the first and most important of Lenin’s dictations, that of December 23, 1922. Stalin’s art of falsifying and misinformation surprises historians again and again.”[29]

Although a million miles removed from Trotsky’s views, this ex-Stalinist cannot hide the truth that Stalin falsified Lenin’s letter in order to conceal from Trotsky and from the Party the degree to which Lenin’s views coincided with those of Trotsky. Even Trotsky, as he states, was not aware of the deception.

The bloc between Lenin and Trotsky did not materialise because Lenin was laid low by a third, devastating stroke which left him incapacitated and unable to communicate. Taking advantage of the position, the triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev deliberately concealed Lenin’s last documents from Trotsky, who then became the target of a malicious campaign of disinformation organised by the apparatus. The myth of

“Trotskyism” was invented in an attempt to drive a wedge between Lenin and Trotsky. The Stalin school of falsification was born.

It has taken over three generations for these suppressed documents to see the light of day. They provide a complete vindication of the truthfulness of Trotsky’s account of events. They are a damning condemnation of the lies and falsifications of the Stalinists. But above all they prove that no amount of persecution and slander can destroy the genuine ideas of Marxism. “The locomotive of history,” as Trotsky wrote, “is truth, not lies.”

London, February 2000

Notes

[1] LCW, vol. 33, p. 57.

[2] Ibid., p. 72.

[3] LCW, vol. 42, p. 418.

[4] LCW (Russian Edition), vol. 54, p. 260.

[5] Fotieva, Iz Vospominanity, pp. 28-9.

[6] LCW, vol. 33, p. 481.

[7] LCW, vol. 35, p. 479.

[8] Quoted in Moshe Lewin, Lenin’s Last Struggle, London 1975, p. 48.

[9] LCW, vol. 42, p. 421.

[10] Reproduced by Trotsky in The Stalin School of Falsification, pp. 66-7.

[11] LCW, vol. 33, p. 372.

[12] Ibid., vol. 42, p. 482.

[13] Ibid., p. 484.

[14] Ibid., p. 484, our emphasis.

[15] Ibid., p. 620.

[16] Ibid., p. 485.

[17] LCW, vol. 33, p. 487.

[18] LCW, vol. 42, p. 279.

[19] LCW (Russian Edition), vol. 54, p. 674.

[20] Quoted in Lewin, op. cit., pp. 152-3.

[21] A. A. Stoltz a member of the Presidium. LCW, vol. 42, p. 621.

[22] Yuri A. Buranov, Lenin’s Will, 1994, p. 23.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 24.

[26] Ibid., p. 25.

[27] Ibid., our emphasis.

[28] Ibid., p. 25.

[29] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

Appendix C – Lenin’s Last Letters

To Leon Trotsky

[1]

December 12, 1922

Comrade Trotsky,

I am sending you Krestinsky’s[*] letter. Write to me as soon as possible whether you agree; at the plenum, I am going to fight for the monopoly.

What about you?

Yours,

Lenin

P.S. It would be best returned soon.

To M.I. Frumkin and B.S. Stomonyakov

[2]

December 12, 1922

To Comrades Frumkin and Stomonyakov, copy to Trotsky.

In view of my increasing sickness, I cannot be present at the plenum. I am fully aware how awkwardly, and even worse than awkwardly, I am behaving in relation to you, but all the same, I cannot possibly speak.

Today I received the enclosed letter from Comrade Trotsky, with which I agree in all essentials, with the exception perhaps of the last lines about the State Planning Commission. I will write Trotsky of my agreement with him and ask him to take upon himself, in view of my sickness, the defence of my position at the plenum.

I think that this defence ought to be divided into three parts.

First, defence of the fundamental principle of the monopoly of foreign trade, giving it full and final confirmation.

Second, delegating to a special commission the detailed consideration of those practical plans for realising this monopoly advanced by Avanesov. At least half of this commission ought to consist of representatives from the Commissariat of

Foreign Trade.

Third, separate consideration of the work of the State Planning Commission. By the way, I think that there will probably be no disagreement between Trotsky and me, if he confines himself to the demand that the work of the State Planning Commission, carried on under the heading of the development of state industry, should have repercussions on all aspects of the activity of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade.

I hope to write again today or tomorrow and send you my declaration to the Central Committee plenum on the essence of this problem. At any rate, I think this question is of such fundamental importance that in case I do not get the agreement of the plenum, I must take it into the party congress, and before that, announce the existence of this disagreement in the fraction of our party at the coming Congress of Soviets.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F. [Lydia Fotieva]

To Leon Trotsky

[3]

December 13, 1922

Copy to Frumkin and Stomonyakov

Comrade Trotsky,

I have received your comments on Krestinsky's letter and Avanesov's plans. I think that you and I are in maximum agreement, and I believe that the State Planning Commission question, as presented in this case, rules out (or postpones) any discussion on whether the State Planning Commission needs to have any administrative rights.

At any rate, I would urge that at the forthcoming plenum you should undertake the defence of our common standpoint on the unconditional need to maintain and consolidate the foreign trade monopoly. The preceding plenum passed a decision in this respect which runs entirely counter to the foreign trade monopoly, and there can be no concessions on this matter. I believe, therefore, as I say in my letter to Frumkin and Stomonyakov, that in the event of our defeat on this question we must refer the question to a party congress. This will require a brief exposition of our differences before the party group of the forthcoming congress of Soviets. If I have time, I shall write this, and I would be very glad if you did the same. Hesitation on this question is doing us unprecedented harm and the negative arguments boil down entirely to accusations of shortcomings in the apparatus. But our apparatus is everywhere imperfect, and to abandon the monopoly because of an imperfect apparatus would be throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Lenin

To Leon Trotsky

[4]

[4]

December 15, 1922

Comrade Trotsky,

I send you a letter received today from Frumkin. I also think that it is absolutely necessary to settle this question once and for all. If there is any fear that this question excites me and might have a bad effect on my health, I think this is wholly wrong because I should be ten thousand times more excited by a delay which would make completely unstable our policy upon one of the fundamental questions. Therefore, I call your attention to the enclosed letter and earnestly ask you to support an immediate consideration of this question. I am convinced that if we are in danger of losing out, it would be far more advantageous to lose out before the party congress, and immediately turn to the fraction of the Soviet congress than to lose out after the congress. Perhaps such a compromise as this would be acceptable: adopt the decision about confirmation of the monopoly now but raise the question nevertheless at the party congress and make that agreement now. No other compromise, in my opinion, would be to our interest in any circumstances.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F.

To Leon Trotsky

[5]

December 15, 1922

Comrade Trotsky,

I consider that we have quite reached agreement. I ask you to declare our solidarity at the plenum. I hope that our decision will be passed because some of those who had voted against it in October have now partially or all together switched to our side.

If for some reason our decision should not be passed we shall turn to our fraction at the Congress of Soviets and declare that we are referring the question to the Party congress.

In that case, inform me and I shall send in my statement.

Yours,

Lenin

P.S. If this question should be removed from the present plenum (which I do not expect and against which you should, of course, protest as strongly as you can on our common behalf), I think that we should apply to our fraction at the Congress of Soviets anyway and demand that the question be referred to the party congress, because any further hesitation is absolutely intolerable. You can keep all the material I have sent you until after the plenum.

Letter to Joseph Stalin for Central Committee Members

[6]

December 15, 1922

I have now finished winding up my affairs and can leave with my mind at peace. I have also come to an agreement with Trotsky on the defence of my views on the monopoly of foreign trade. Only one circumstance still worries me very much; it is that it will be impossible for me to speak at the Congress of Soviets. My doctors are coming on Tuesday and we shall see if there is even a small chance of my speaking. I would consider it a great inconvenience to miss the opportunity of speaking, to say the least. I finished preparing the summary a few days ago. I therefore propose that the writing of a report which somebody will deliver should go ahead, and that the possibility be left open until Wednesday that I will perhaps personally make a speech, a much shorter one than usual, for example, one that will take three-quarters of an hour. Such a speech would in no way hinder the speech of my deputy (whoever you may appoint for this purpose), but would be useful politically and from the personal angle, as it would eliminate cause for great anxiety. Please have this in mind, and if the opening of the congress is delayed, inform me in good time through my secretary.

Lenin

P.S. I am emphatically against any procrastination on the question of the monopoly of foreign trade. If any circumstance (including the circumstance that my participation is desirable in the debate over this question) gives rise to the idea to postpone it to the next plenary meeting, I would most emphatically be against it because, first, I am sure Trotsky will uphold my views as well as I; second, the statements that you, Zinoviev, and, according to rumours, Kamenev have made prove that some members of the CC have already changed their

minds; third, and most important, any further vacillation over this extremely important question is absolutely impermissible and will wreck all our work.

Lenin

To Leon Trotsky

[7]

December 21, 1922

It looks as though it has been possible to take the position without a single shot, by a simple manoeuvre. I suggest that we should not stop and should continue the offensive and for that purpose put through a motion to raise at the party congress the question of consolidating our foreign trade and of measures to improve its implementation. This to be announced in our fraction at the Congress of Soviets. I hope that you will not object to this, and will not refuse to give a report in the group.

N. Lenin

P.S. Vladimir Ilyich also asks that you telephone your reply. N.K. Ulyanova [Krupskaya].[8]

Letter to the Congress

[9]

[9]

December 23, 1922

I would urge strongly that at this Congress a number of changes be made in our political structure.

I want to tell you of the considerations to which I attach most importance.

At the head of the list I set an increase in the number of Central Committee members to a few dozen or even a hundred. It is my opinion that without this reform our Central Committee would be in great danger if the course of events were not quite favourable for us (and that is something we cannot count on).

Then, I intend to propose that the Congress should on certain conditions invest the decisions of the State Planning Commission with legislative force, meeting, in this respect, the wishes of Comrade Trotsky to a certain extent and on certain conditions.

As for the first point, i.e. increasing the number of CC members, I think it must be done in order to raise the prestige of the Central Committee, to do a thorough job of improving our administrative machinery and to prevent conflicts between small sections of the CC from acquiring excessive importance for the future of the Party.

It seems to me that our Party has every right to demand from the working class

50 to 100 CC members, and that it could get them from it without unduly taxing the resources of that class.

Such a reform would considerably increase the stability of our Party and ease its struggle in the encirclement of hostile states, which, in my opinion, is likely to, and must, become much more acute in the next few years. I think that the stability of our Party would gain a thousand fold by such measure.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V. [Maria Volodicheva]

Letter to the Congress (The Testament of Lenin)

December 25, 1922

By stability of the Central Committee, of which I spoke above, I mean measures against a split, as far as such measures can at all be taken. For, of course, the White Guard in Russkaya Mysl (it seems to have been S.S. Oldenburg) was right when, first, in the White Guards' game against Soviet Russia he banked on a split in our Party, and when, secondly, he banked on grave differences in our Party to cause that split.

Our Party relies on two classes and therefore its instability would be possible and its downfall inevitable if there were no agreement between those two classes. In that event this or that measure, and generally all talk about the

stability of our CC, would be futile. No measure of any kind could prevent a split in such a case. But I hope that this is too remote a future and too improbable an event to talk about.

I have in mind stability as a guarantee against a split in the immediate future, and I intend to deal here with a few ideas concerning personal qualities.

I think that from this standpoint the prime factors in the question of stability are such members of the CC as Stalin and Trotsky. I think relations between them make up the greater part of the danger of a split, which could be avoided, and this purpose, in my opinion, would be served, among other things, by increasing the number of CC members to 50 or 100.

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has unlimited authority concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution. Comrade Trotsky, on the other hand, as his struggle against the CC on the question of the People's Commissariat of Communications has already proved, is distinguished not only by outstanding ability. He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present CC, but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work.

These two qualities of the two outstanding leaders of the present CC can inadvertently lead to a split, and if our Party does not take steps to avert this, the split may come unexpectedly.

I shall not give any further appraisals of the personal qualities of other members of the CC. I shall just recall that the October episode with Zinoviev and Kamenev was, of course, no accident, but neither can the blame for it be laid upon them personally, any more than non-Bolshevism can upon Trotsky.

Speaking of the young CC members, I wish to say a few words about Bukharin and Pyatakov. They are, in my opinion, the most outstanding figures (among the youngest ones), and the following must be borne in mind about them: Bukharin is not only a most valuable and major theorist of the Party; he is also rightly considered the favourite of the whole Party, but his theoretical views can be classified as fully Marxist only with great reserve, for there is something scholastic about him. (He has never made a study of the dialectics, and, I think, never fully understood it.)

As for Pyatakov, he is unquestionably a man of outstanding will and outstanding ability, but shows too much zeal for administrating and the administrative side of the work to be relied upon in a serious political matter.

Both of these remarks, of course, are made only for the present, on the assumption that both these outstanding and devoted Party workers fail to find an occasion to enhance their knowledge and amend their one-sidedness.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

P.S. Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a General Secretary. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail. But I

think that from the standpoint of safeguards against a split and from the standpoint of what I wrote above about the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky it is not a [minor] detail, but it is a detail which can assume decisive importance.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F.

January 4, 1923

Note on Enlargement of the Central Committee

December 26, 1922

The increase in the number of CC members to 50 or even 100 must, in my opinion serve a double or even a treble purpose: the more members there are in the CC, the more men will be trained in CC work and the less danger there will be of a split due to some indiscretion. The enlistment of many workers to the CC will help the workers to improve our administrative machinery, which is pretty bad. We inherited it, in effect, from the old regime, for it was absolutely impossible to reorganise it in such a short time, especially in conditions of war, famine, etc. That is why those “critics” who point to the defects of our administrative machinery out of mockery or malice may be calmly answered that they do not in the least understand the conditions of the revolution today. It is altogether impossible in five years to reorganise the machinery adequately, especially in the conditions in which our revolution took place. It is enough that in five years we have created a new type of state in which the workers are

leading the peasants against the bourgeoisie; and in a hostile international environment this in itself is a gigantic achievement. But knowledge of this must on no account blind us to the fact that, in effect we took over the old machinery of state from the tsar and the bourgeoisie and that now, with the onset of peace and the satisfaction of the minimum requirements against famine, all our work must be directed towards improving the administrative machinery.

I think that a few dozen workers, being members of the CC, can deal better than anybody else with checking, improving and remodelling our state apparatus. The Workers' and Peasants' Inspection on whom this function devolved at the beginning proved unable to cope with it and can be used only as an "appendage" or, on certain conditions, as an assistant to these members of the CC. In my opinion, the workers admitted to the Central Committee should come preferably not from among those who have had long service in Soviet bodies (in this part of my letter the term workers everywhere includes peasants), because those workers have already acquired the very traditions and the very prejudices which it is desirable to combat.

The working class members of the CC must be mainly workers of a lower stratum than those promoted in the last five years to work in Soviet bodies; they must be people closer to being rank and file workers and peasants, who, however, do not fall into the category of direct or indirect exploiters. I think that by attending all sittings of the CC and all sittings of the Political Bureau, and by reading all the documents of the CC, such workers can form a staff of devoted supporters of the Soviet system, able, first, to give stability to the CC itself, and second, to work effectively on the renewal and improvement of the state apparatus.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F.

Granting Legislative Functions to Gosplan

[10]

December 27, 1922

This idea was suggested by Comrade Trotsky, it seems, quite a long time ago. I was against it at the time, because I thought that there would then be a fundamental lack of coordination in the system of our legislative institutions. But after closer consideration of the matter I find that in substance there is a sound idea in it, namely: Gosplan (State Planning Commission) stands somewhat apart from our legislative institutions, although, as a body of experienced people, experts, representatives of science and technology, it is actually in a better position to form a correct judgement of affairs.

However, we have so far proceeded from the principle that Gosplan must provide the state with critically analysed material and the state institutions must decide state matters. I think that in the present situation, when affairs of state have become unusually complicated, when it is necessary time and again to settle questions of which some require the expert opinion of the members of Gosplan and some do not, and, what is more, to settle matters which need the expert opinion of Gosplan on some points but not on others. I think that we must now take a step towards extending the competence of Gosplan.

I imagine that step to be such that the decisions of Gosplan could not be rejected by ordinary procedure in Soviet bodies, but would need a special procedure to be reconsidered. For example, the question should be submitted to a session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, prepared for reconsideration according to a special instruction, involving the drawing up, under special rules, of

memoranda to examine whether Gosplan decision is subject to reversal. Lastly, special time-limits should be set for the reconsideration of Gosplan decisions, etc.

In this respect I think we can and must accede to the wishes of Comrade Trotsky, but not in the sense that specifically any one of our political leaders, or the Chairman of the Supreme Economic Council, etc., should be Chairman of Gosplan. I think that personal matters are at present too closely interwoven with the question of principle. I think that the attacks which are now made against the Chairman of Gosplan, Comrade Krzhizhanovsky, and Comrade Pyatakov, his deputy, and which proceed along two lines, so that, on the one hand, we hear charges of extreme leniency, lack of independent judgement and lack of backbone, and, on the other, charges of excessive coarseness, drill-sergeant methods, lack of solid scientific background, etc. I think these attacks express two sides of the question, exaggerating them to the extreme, and that in actual fact we need a skilful combination in Gosplan of two types of character, of which one may be exemplified by Comrade Pyatakov and the other by Comrade Krzhizhanovsky.

I think that Gosplan must be headed by a man who, on the one hand, has scientific education, namely, either technical or agronomic, with decades of experience in practical work in the field of technology or of agronomics. I think this man must possess not so much the qualities of an administrator as broad experience and the ability to enlist the services of other men.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F.

December 28, 1922

I have noticed that some of our comrades who are able to exercise a decisive influence on the direction of state affairs, exaggerate the administrative side, which, of course, is necessary in its time and place, but which should not be confused with the scientific side, with a grasp of the broad facts, the ability to recruit men, etc.

In every state institution, especially in the Gosplan, the combination of these two qualities is essential; and when Comrade Krzhizhanovsky told me that he had enlisted the services of Comrade Pyatakov for the Commission and had come to terms with him about the work, I, in consenting to this, on the one hand, entertained certain doubts and, on the other, sometimes hoped that we would thus get the combination of the two types of statesmen. To see whether those hopes are justified, we must now wait and consider the matter on the strength of somewhat longer experience, but in principle, I think, there can be no doubt that such a combination of temperaments and types (of men and qualities) is absolutely necessary for the correct functioning of state institutions. I think that here it is just as harmful to exaggerate “administrating” as it is to exaggerate anything at all. The chief of a state institution must possess a high degree of personal appeal and sufficiently solid scientific and technical knowledge to be able to check people’s work. That much is basic. Without it the work cannot be done properly. On the other hand, it is very important that he should be capable of administering and should have a worthy assistant, or assistants, in the matter. The combination of these two qualities in one person will hardly be found, and it is hardly necessary.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F.

December 29, 1922

Gosplan is apparently developing in all respects into a commission of experts.

Such an institution cannot be headed by anybody except a man with great experience and an all-round scientific education in technology. The administrative element must in essence be subsidiary. A certain independence and autonomy of the Gosplan is essential for the prestige of this scientific institution and depends on one thing, namely, the conscientiousness of its workers and their conscientious desire to turn our plan of economic and social development into reality.

This last quality may, of course, be found now only as an exception, for the overwhelming majority of scientists, who naturally make up the Commission, are inevitably infected with bourgeois ideas and bourgeois prejudices. The check on them from this standpoint must be the job of several persons who can form the Presidium of the Commission. These must be Communists to keep a day-to-day check on the extent of the bourgeois scientists' devotion to our cause displayed in the whole course of the work and see that they abandon bourgeois prejudices and gradually adopt the socialist standpoint.

This work along the twin lines of scientific checking and pure administration should be the ideal of those who run the State Planning Commission in our Republic.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

December 29, 1922

Is it rational to divide the work of the State Planning Commission into separate jobs? Should we not, on the contrary, try to build up a group of permanent specialists who would be systematically checked by the Presidium of the Commission and could solve the whole range of problems within its ambit? I think that the latter would be the more reasonable and that we must try to cut down the number of temporary and urgent tasks.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

December 29, 1922

In increasing the number of its members, the CC, I think, must also, and perhaps mainly, devote attention to checking and improving our administrative machinery, which is no good at all. For this we must enlist the services of highly qualified specialists, and the task of supplying those specialists must devolve upon the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection.

How are we to combine these checking specialists, people with adequate knowledge, and the new members of the CC? This problem must be resolved in practice.

It seems to me that the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (as a result of its

development and of our perplexity about its development) has led all in all to what we now observe, namely, to an intermediate position between a special People's Commissariat and a special function of the members of the CC; between an institution that inspects anything and everything and an aggregate of not very numerous but first-class inspectors, who must be well paid. (This is especially indispensable in our age when every thing must be paid for and inspectors are directly employed by the institutions that pay them better.)

If the number of CC members is increased in the appropriate way, and they go through a course of state management year after year with the help of highly qualified specialists and of members of the Workers' and Peasants Inspection who are highly authoritative in every branch then, I think, we shall successfully solve this problem which we have not managed to do for such a long time.

To sum up, 100 members of the CC at the most and not more than 400-500 assistants, members of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, engaged in inspecting under their direction.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation'

December 30, 1922

I suppose I have been very remiss with respect to the workers of Russia for not having intervened energetically and decisively enough in the notorious question of autonomisation, which, it appears, is officially called the question of the Soviet Socialist Republics.

When this question arose last summer, I was ill. Then in the autumn I relied too much on my recovery, and on the October and December plenary meetings giving me an opportunity of intervening in this question. However, I did not manage to attend the October plenary meeting (when this question came up) or the one in December, and so the question passed me by almost completely.

I have only had time for a talk with Comrade Dzerzhinsky, who came from the Caucasus and told me how this matter stood in Georgia. I have also managed to exchange a few words with Comrade Zinoviev and express my apprehensions on this matter. From what I was told by Comrade Dzerzhinsky, who was at the head of the commission sent by the CC to “investigate” the Georgian incident, I could only draw the greatest apprehensions. If matters had come to such a pass that Ordzhonikidze could go to the extreme of applying physical violence, as Comrade Dzerzhinsky informed me, we can imagine what a mess we have got ourselves into. Obviously the whole business of “autonomisation” was radically wrong and badly timed.

It is said that a united apparatus was needed. Where did that assurance come from? Did it not come from that same Russian apparatus which, as I pointed out in one of the preceding sections of my diary, we took over from tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil?

There is no doubt that that measure should have been delayed somewhat until we could say that we vouched for our apparatus as our own. But now, we must, in all conscience, admit the contrary; the apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us; it is a bourgeois and tsarist hotch-potch and there has been no possibility of getting rid of it in the course of the past five years without the help

of other countries and because we have been “busy” most of the time with military engagements and the fight against famine.

It is quite natural that in such circumstances the “freedom to secede from the union” by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is. There is no doubt that the infinitesimal percentage of Soviet and sovietised workers will drown in that tide of chauvinistic Great-Russian riffraff like a fly in milk.

It is said in defence of this measure that the People’s Commissariats directly concerned with national psychology and national education were set up as separate bodies. But there the question arises: can these People’s Commissariats be made quite independent? And secondly: were we careful enough to take measures to provide the non-Russians with a real safeguard against the truly Russian bully? I do not think we took such measures although we could and should have done so.

I think that Stalin’s haste and his infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious “nationalist-socialism”, played a fatal role here. In politics spite generally plays the basest of roles.

I also fear that Comrade Dzerzhinsky, who went to the Caucasus to investigate the “crime” of those “nationalist-socialists”, distinguished himself there by his truly Russian frame of mind (it is common knowledge that people of other nationalities who have become Russified overdo this Russian frame of mind) and that the impartiality of his whole commission was typified well enough by Ordzhonikidze’s “manhandling”. I think that no provocation or even insult can justify such Russian manhandling and that Comrade Dzerzhinsky was inexcusably guilty in adopting a light-hearted attitude towards it.

For all the citizens in the Caucasus Ordzhonikidze was the authority. Ordzhonikidze had no right to display that irritability to which he and Dzerzhinsky referred. On the contrary, Ordzhonikidze should have behaved with a restraint which cannot be demanded of any ordinary citizen, still less of a man accused of a “political” crime. And, to tell the truth, those nationalist-socialists were citizens who were accused of a political crime, and the terms of the accusation were such that it could not be described otherwise.

Here we have an important question of principle: how is internationalism to be understood?

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

December 31, 1922

In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of

times without noticing it. It is sufficient to recall my Volga reminiscences of how non-Russians are treated; how the Poles are not called by any other name than Polyachiska, how the Tatar is nicknamed Prince, how the Ukrainians are always Khokhols and the Georgians and other Caucasian nationals always Kapkasians.

That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or “great” nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which exists in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view.

What is important for the proletarian? For the proletarian it is not only important, it is absolutely essential that he should be assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle. What is needed to ensure this? Not merely formal equality. In one way or another, by one’s attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate the non-Russian for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the “dominant” nation subjected them in the past.

I think it is unnecessary to explain this to Bolsheviks, to Communists, in greater detail. And I think that in the present instance, as far as the Georgian nation is concerned, we have a typical case in which a genuinely proletarian attitude makes profound caution, thoughtfulness and a readiness to compromise a matter of necessity for us. The Georgian [Stalin] who is neglectful of this aspect of the question, or who carelessly flings about accusations of “nationalist-socialism” (whereas he himself is a real and true “nationalist-socialist”, and even a vulgar Great-Russian bully), violates, in substance, the interests of proletarian class solidarity, for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice; “offended” nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of

this equality, if only through negligence or jest to the violation of that equality by their proletarian comrades. That is why in this case it is better to overdo rather than underdo the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities. That is why, in this case, the fundamental interest of proletarian class struggle, requires that we never adopt a formal attitude to the national question, but always take into account the specific attitude of the proletarian of the oppressed (or small) nation towards the oppressor (or great) nation.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

December 31, 1922

What practical measures must be taken in the present situation?

Firstly, we must maintain and strengthen the union of socialist republics. Of this there can be no doubt. This measure is necessary for us and it is necessary for the world communist proletariat in its struggle against the world bourgeoisie and its defence against bourgeois intrigues.

Secondly, the union of socialist republics must be retained for its diplomatic apparatus. By the way, this apparatus is an exceptional component of our state apparatus. We have not allowed a single influential person from the old tsarist apparatus into it. All sections with any authority are composed of Communists. That is why it has already won for itself (this may be said boldly) the name of a reliable communist apparatus purged to an incomparably greater extent of the old tsarist, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements than that which we have had

to make do with in other People's Commissariats.

Thirdly, exemplary punishment must be inflicted on Comrade Ordzhonikidze (I say this all the more regretfully as I am one of his personal friends and have worked with him abroad) and the investigation of all the material which Dzerzhinsky's commission has collected must be completed or started over again to correct the enormous mass of wrongs and biased judgments which it doubtlessly contains. The political responsibility for all this truly Great-Russian nationalist campaign must, of course, be laid on Stalin and Dzerzhinsky.

Fourthly, the strictest rules must be introduced on the use of the national language in the non-Russian republics of our union, and these rules must be checked with special care. There is no doubt that our apparatus being what it is, there is bound to be, on the pretext of unity in the railway service, unity in the fiscal service and so on, a mass of truly Russian abuses. Special ingenuity is necessary for the struggle against these abuses, not to mention special sincerity on the part of those who undertake this struggle. A detailed code will be required, and only the nationals living in the republic in question can draw it up at all successfully. And then we cannot be sure in advance that as a result of this work we shall not take a step backward at our next Congress of Soviets, i.e. retain the union of Soviet socialist republics only for military and diplomatic affairs, and in all other respects restore full independence to the individual People's Commissariats.

It must be borne in mind that the decentralisation of the People's Commissariats and the lack of co-ordination in their work as far as Moscow and other centres are concerned can be compensated sufficiently by Party authority, if it is exercised with sufficient prudence and impartiality; the harm that can result to our state from a lack of unification between the national apparatuses and the Russian apparatus is infinitely less than that which will be done not only to us, but to the whole International, and to the hundreds of millions of the peoples of Asia, which is destined to follow us on to the stage of history in the near future. It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of debut of the East, just as

it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities. The need to rally against the imperialists of the West, who are defending the capitalist world, is one thing. There can be no doubt about that and it would be superfluous for me to speak about my unconditional approval of it. It is another thing when we ourselves lapse, even if only in trifles, into imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities, thus undermining all our principled sincerity, all our principled defence of the struggle against imperialism. But the morrow of world history will be a day when the awakening peoples oppressed by imperialism are finally aroused and the decisive long and hard struggle for their liberation begins.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.

How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection

(Recommendation to the Twelfth Party Congress)

[11]

January 23, 1923

It is beyond question that the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection is an enormous difficulty for us, and that so far this difficulty has not been overcome. I think that the comrades who try to overcome the difficulty by denying that the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection is useful and necessary are wrong. But I do not deny that the problem presented by our state apparatus and the task of improving it is

very difficult, that it is far from being solved, and is an extremely urgent one.

With the exception of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, our state apparatus is to a considerable extent a survival of the past and has undergone hardly any serious change. It has only been slightly touched up on the surface, but in all other respects it is a most typical relic of our old state machine. And so, to find a method of really renovating it, I think we ought to turn for experience to our Civil War.

How did we act in the more critical moment of the Civil War?

We concentrated our best Party forces in the Red Army; we mobilised the best of our workers; we looked for new forces at the deepest roots of our dictatorship.

I am convinced that we must go to the same source to find the means of reorganising the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection. I recommend that our Twelfth Party Congress adopt the following plan of reorganisation, based on some enlargement of our Central Control Commission.

The plenary meetings of the Central Committee of our Party are already revealing a tendency to develop into a kind of supreme Party conference. They take place, on the average, not more than once in two months, while the routine work is conducted, as we know, on behalf of the Central Committee by our Political Bureau, our Organising Bureau, our Secretariat, and so forth. I think we ought to follow the road we have thus taken to the end and definitely transform the plenary meetings of the Central Committee into supreme Party conferences convened once in two months jointly with the Central Control Commission.

The Central Control Commission should be combined with the main body of the reorganised Workers' and Peasants' Inspection along the following lines:

I propose that the Congress should elect 75 to 100 new members to the Central Control Commission. They should be workers and peasants, and should go through the same Party screening as ordinary members of the Central Committee, because they are to enjoy the same rights as the members of the Central Committee.

On the other hand, the staff of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection should be reduced to three or four hundred persons, specially screened for conscientiousness and knowledge of our state apparatus. They must also undergo a special test as regards their knowledge of the principles of scientific organisation of labour in general, and of administrative work, office work, and so forth, in particular.

In my opinion, such a union of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection with the Central Control Commission will be beneficial to both these institutions. On the one hand, the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection will thus obtain such high authority that it will certainly not be inferior to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. On the other hand, our Central Committee, together with the Central Control Commission, will definitely take the road of becoming a supreme Party conference, which in fact it has already taken, and along which it should proceed to the end so as to be able to fulfil its functions properly in two respects: in respect to its own methodical, expedient and systematic organisation of work, and in respect to maintaining contacts with the broad masses through the medium of the best of our workers and peasants.

I foresee an objection that, directly or indirectly, may come from those spheres which make our state apparatus antiquated, i.e. from those who urge that its present, utterly impossible, indecently pre-revolutionary form be preserved (incidentally, we now have an opportunity which rarely occurs in history of

ascertaining the period necessary for bringing about radical social changes; we now see clearly what can be done in five years, and what requires much more time). The objection I foresee is that the change I propose will lead to nothing but chaos. The members of the Central Control Commission will wander around all the institutions, not knowing where, why or to whom to apply, causing disorganisation everywhere and distracting employees from their routine work, etc., etc.

I think that the malicious source of this objection is so obvious that it does not warrant a reply. It goes without saying that the Presidium of the Central Control Commission, the People's Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection and his collegium (and also, in the proper cases, the Secretariat of our Central Committee) will have to put in years of persistent effort to get the Commissariat properly organised, and to get it to function smoothly in conjunction with the Central Control Commission. In my opinion, the People's Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, as well as the whole collegium, can (and should) remain and guide the work of the entire Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, including the work of all the members of the Central Control Commission who will be "placed under his command". The three or four hundred employees of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection that are to remain, according to my plan, should, on the one hand, perform purely secretarial functions for the other members of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection and for the supplementary members of the Central Control Commission; and, on the other hand, they should be highly skilled, specially screened, particularly reliable, and highly paid, so that they may be relieved of their present truly unhappy (to say the least) position of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection officials.

I am sure that the reduction of the staff to the number I have indicated will greatly enhance the efficiency of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection personnel and the quality of all its work, enabling the People's Commissar and the members of the collegium to concentrate their efforts entirely on organising work and on systematically and steadily improving its efficiency, which is so absolutely essential for our workers' and peasants' government, and for our Soviet system.

On the other hand, I also think that the People's Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection should work partly combining and partly co-ordinating those higher institutions for the organisation of labour (the Central Institute of Labour, etc.), of which there are now no fewer than twelve in our Republic. Excessive uniformity and a consequent desire to unity will be harmful. On the contrary, what is needed here is a reasonable and expedient mean between combining all these institutions and properly delimiting them, allowing for a certain independence in each of them.

Our own Central Committee will undoubtedly gain no less from this reorganisation than the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection. It will gain because its contacts with the masses will be greater and because the regularity and effectiveness of its work will improve. It will then be possible (and necessary) to institute a stricter and more responsible procedure of preparing for the meetings of the Political Bureau, which should be attended by a definite number of members of the Central Control Commission determined either from a definite period by some organisation plan.

In distributing work to the members of the, Central Control Commission, the People's Commissar of the Workers' and Peasants' inspection, in conjunction with the Presidium of the Central Control Commission, should impose on them the duty either of attending the meetings of the Political Bureau for the purpose of examining all the documents pertaining to matters that come before it in one way or another; or of devoting their working time to theoretical study, to the study of scientific methods of organising labour; or of taking a practical part in the work of supervising and improving our machinery of state, from the higher state institutions to the lower local bodies, etc.

I also think that in addition to the political advantages occurring from the fact that the members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission will, as a consequence of this reform, be much better informed and better prepared for the meetings of the Political Bureau (all the documents relevant to

the business to be discussed at these meetings should be sent to all the members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission not later than the day before the meeting of the Political Bureau, except in absolutely urgent cases, for which special methods of informing the members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission and of settling these matters must be devised), there will also be the advantage that the influence of purely personal and incidental factors in our Central Committee will diminish, and this will reduce the danger of a split.

Our Central Committee has grown into a strictly centralised and highly authoritative group, but the conditions under which this group is working are not concurrent with its authority. The reform I recommend should help to remove this defect, and the members of the Central Control Commission, whose duty it will be to attend all meetings of the Political Bureau in a definite number, will have to form a compact group which should not allow anybody's authority without exception, neither that of the General Secretary [Stalin] nor of any other member of the Central Committee, to prevent them from putting questions, verifying documents, and, in general, from keeping themselves fully informed of all things and from exercising the strictest control over the proper conduct of affairs.

Of course, in our Soviet Republic, the social order is based on the collaboration of two classes: the workers and peasants, in which the "Nepmen", i.e. the bourgeoisie, are now permitted to participate on certain terms. If serious class disagreements arise between these classes, a split will be inevitable. But the grounds for such a split are not inevitable in our social system, and it is the principal tasks of our Central Committee and Central Control Commission, as well as of our party as a whole, to watch very closely over such circumstances as may cause a split, and to forestall them, for in the final analysis the fate of our Republic will depend on whether the peasant masses will stand by the working class, loyal to their alliance, or whether they will permit the "Nepmen", i.e. the new bourgeoisie, to drive a wedge between them and the working class, to split them off from the working class. The more clearly we see this alternative, the more clearly all our workers and peasants understand it, the greater are the chances that we shall avoid a split which would be fatal for the Soviet Republic.

Lenin

To Leon Trotsky

[12]

March 5, 1923

Top secret

Personal

Dear Comrade Trotsky,

It is my earnest request that you should undertake the defence of the Georgian case in the Party CC. This case is now under “persecution” by Stalin and Dzerzhinsky, and I cannot rely on their impartiality. Quite to the contrary. I would feel at ease if you agreed to undertake its defence. If you should refuse to do so for any reason, return the whole case to me. I shall consider it a sign that you do not accept.

With best comradely greetings,

Lenin[13]

To Joseph Stalin

[14]

March 5, 1923

Top secret

Personal

Copy to Comrades Kamenev and Zinoviev

Dear Comrade Stalin,

You have been so rude as to summon my wife to the telephone and abuse her. Although she had told you that she was prepared to forget this, the fact nevertheless became known through her to Zinoviev and Kamenev. I have no intention of forgetting so easily what has been done against me, and it goes without saying that what has been done against my wife I consider having been done against me as well. I ask you, therefore, to think it over whether you are prepared to withdraw what you have said and to make your apologies, or whether you prefer that relations between us should be broken off.

Respectfully yours,

Lenin

To P.G. Mdivani, F.Y. Makharadze, and Others

[15]

March 6, 1923

Top secret

Comrades Mdivani, Makharadze, and others

Copy to Comrades Trotsky and Kamenev

Dear comrades,

I am following your case with all my heart. I am indignant over Ordzhonikidze's rudeness and the connivance of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky. I am preparing for you notes and a speech.

Respectfully yours,

Notes

[1] LCW, vol. 45, p. 601.

[*] N. N. Krestinsky, RSFSR representative in Germany, had written about improving trade with Germany and the need to maintain the state monopoly of foreign trade.

[2] From Trotsky's 'Letter to the Bureau of Party History'. See Trotsky, The Stalin School of Falsification, London, 1974, p. 47.

[3] LCW, vol. 45, pp. 601-2.

[4] Trotsky, op. cit., p. 49.

[5] LCW, vol. 45, p. 604.

[6] LCW, vol. 33, pp. 460-61.

[7] LCW, vol. 45, p. 606.

[8] This postscript was omitted from the English edition and has been translated from the fifth Russian edition, vol. 54, p. 672.

[9] LCW, vol. 36, pp. 593-97.

[10] LCW, vol. 36, pp. 598-611.

[11] LCW, vol. 33, pp. 481-86.

[12] LCW, vol. 45, p. 607.

[13] A separate sheet, appended to the letter, contains this note by one of Lenin's secretaries: "Comrade Trotsky, To the letter communicated to you by phone, Vladimir Ilyich asked to add for your information that Comrade Kamenev is going to Georgia on Wednesday, and wants to know whether you wish to send anything there yourself. March 5, 1923." (LCW, vol. 45, p. 607.)

[14] LCW, vol. 45, pp. 607-8.

[15] LCW, vol. 45, p. 608.

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